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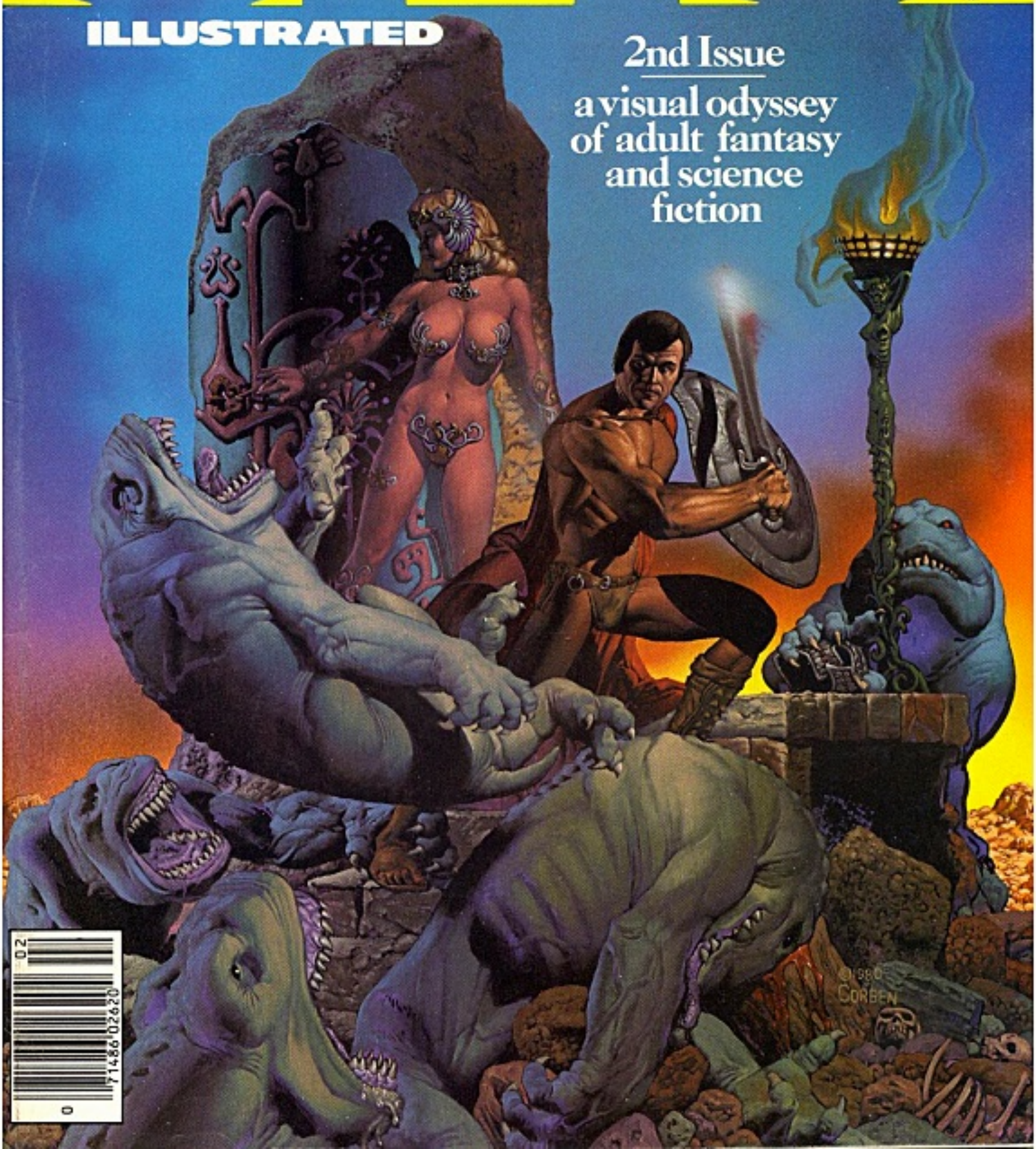
2nd Issue

a visual odyssey of adult fantasy and science fiction



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SUMMER 1980 VOL. 1, NO. 2

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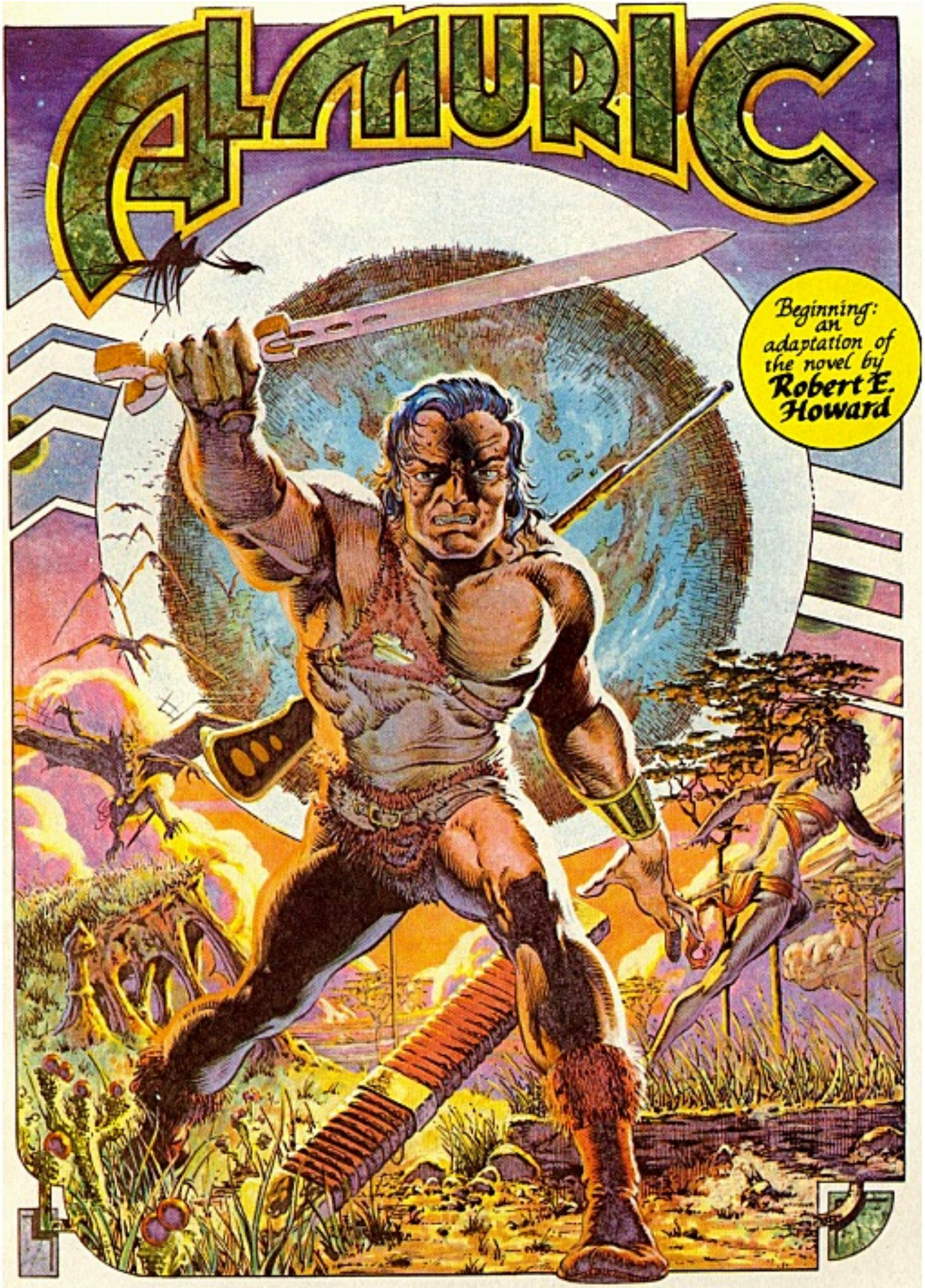


ROY THOMAS SCRIPT

ART TIM CONRAD

From the dictaphone journal of Professor Avery Hildebrand, 1938:
It was not my original intention ever to divulge the whereabouts of Esau Cairn or the mystery surrounding him. However, the peculiar circumstances of--no, let me begin again...
Let me state definitely and flatly at the very outset that Esau Cairn is not, and never was, a criminal.
Moreover, I am certain that, when the red haze of fury faded and he stood looking down at the lifeless body that a few seconds before had been the all-powerful "Boss" Blaine...
...his agony was as real as if the blow he had struck had, instead, been struck against himself.

As sanity returned again to Esau Cairn, he realised that he could not hope to escape the vengeance of the political machine which still ruled the city, even though he himself had just cut off that machine's loathsome head.

No, it was not because of fear that he fled the posh, night-shrouded senatorial offices of the dead man.

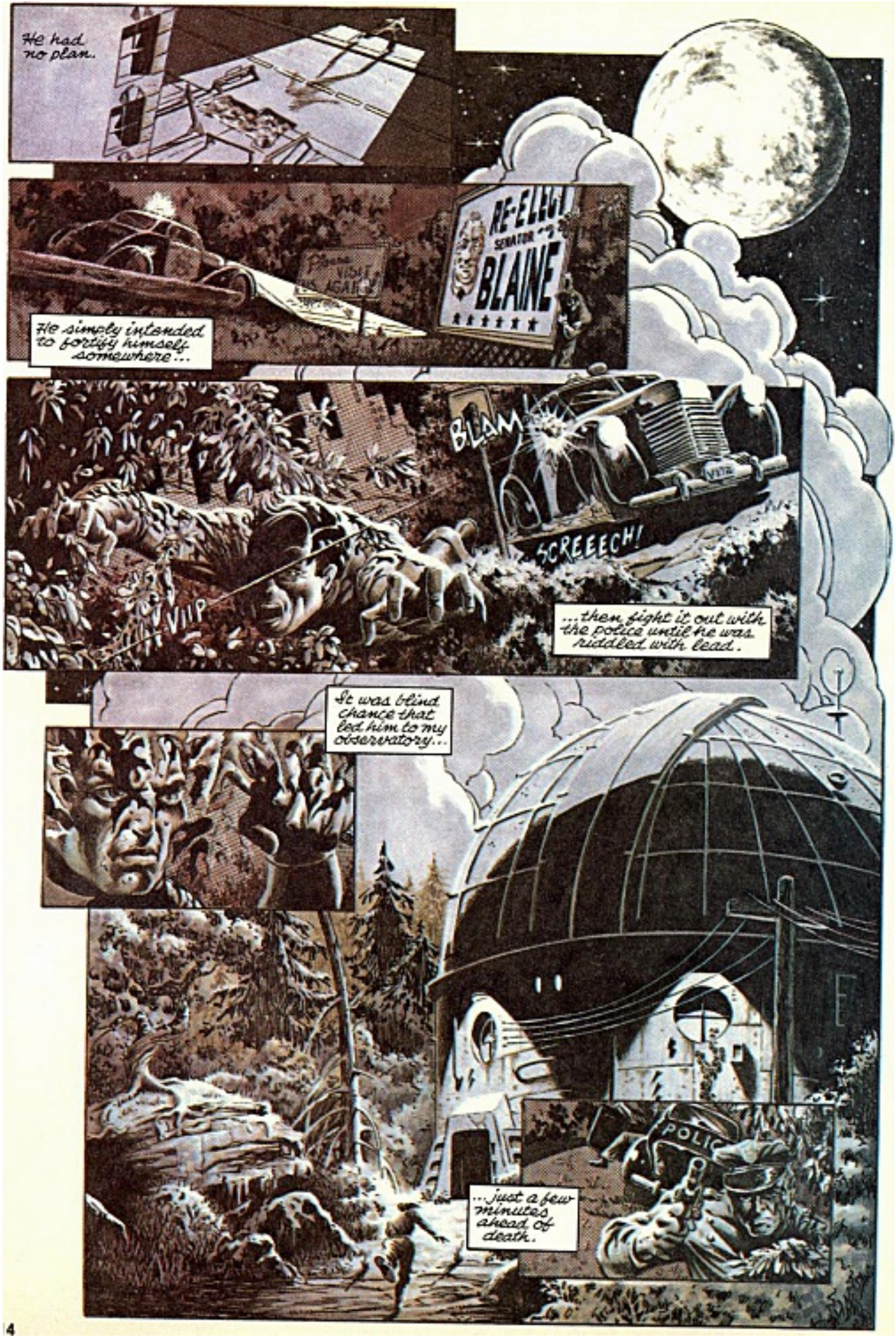
It was simply a primitive impulse...

...some forgotten instinct buried deep within his atavistic brain...

...that led him to seek a more convenient place to turn at bay, and fight out his death fight.
...SUSPECT ABOUT 6'2"... DARK HAIR... VERY STRONG... DANGEROUS... SHOOT ON SIGHT...!

Many men are born outside their century; Esau Cairn was born outside his epoch.
He was of a restless mold, primeval in his passions and with a gusty temper. Thus, his life was a series of unsuccessful attempts at repression.
Born in the Southwest, of old frontier stock, he came of a race whose traditions were those of war and feud and violence.
His college football days were cut short by the crippling injuries he inadvertently caused.
And his boxing career ended the same way, when he almost fatally injured a sparring partner.
His license revoked, he became a nameless wanderer...
...a soldier of fortune...
...eventually gaining skills to match even his Herculean strength and courage.

As for the reasons a corrupt senator appointed him to state office... well, the story was an old one.
He was intended to be an overgrown, stupid puppet... and "Boss" Blaine intended to pull all the strings..
But, though Cairn was big, he was neither a criminal... nor a fool.
YOU! YOU SET ME UP FOR THIS, BLAINE!
SO WHAT IF I DID?
YOU BASTARD! I'M NOT GOING TO JAIL FOR ANYBODY!
SO YOU GO TO JAIL FOR A FEW YEARS! I'LL MAKE IT WORTH YOUR WHILE WHEN YOU GET OUT, AND--
NO? THEN MAYBE YOU'LL SHOOT YOURSELF--BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T STAND THE DISGRACE!
YEAH, I KINDA LIKE THAT...!
Pulling that gun wasn't "Boss" Blaine's first mistake--
--but it was his last.
And now, Esau Cairn was a fugitive... for the final time.


He had no plan.
RE-ELECT
SENATOR
BLAINE
He simply intended to fortify himself somewhere...
BLAM!
SCREEECH!
VIP
...then fight it out with the police until he was riddled with lead.
It was blind chance that led him to my observatory...
...just a few minutes ahead of death.

LET ME IN!
FOR GOD'S SAKE.. LET ME IN!
YES? WHAT IS IT YOU WANT, MY FRIEND?
TO DIE LIKE A MAN-- NOT LIKE A DOG!
A NOT UNREASONABLE REQUEST, MR. CAIRN.
OH YES, I RECOGNIZED YOU AT ONCE... FROM THE DESCRIPTION ON THE POLICE RADIO.
UP THOSE STAIRS, IF YOU WILL.

YOU'VE NO CHANCE IN THE COURTS OF THIS STATE, OF COURSE.
"BOSS" BLAINE'S REACH IS LONG... EVEN FROM THE GRAVE.
THUS, PERHAPS THE TIME HAS COME TO SHARE WITH SOMEONE... WHAT I LIKE TO CALL THE GREAT SECRET.

...SO THAT IS YOUR CHOICE, ESAU CAIRN:
LET ME TRANSPORT YOU, BY MEANS I HAVE ONLY RECENTLY DISCOVERED, TO THE PLANET I HAVE NAMED ALMURIC--IN A SOLAR SYSTEM FAR FROM OUR OWN--
--OR STAND PREPARED TO FACE CERTAIN DOOM, A FEW SHORT SECONDS FROM NOW.
WELL?
I'M READY, PROFESSOR!
IN GOD'S NAME--HURRY!
HEY! HOLD IT IN THERE--!
WH-WHAT THE HELL--?
CAIRN'S GONE! BUT WHERE--??

ACTUALLY, I'M NOT QUITE SURE MYSELF, GENTLEMEN.
AT THIS MOMENT, HE COULD BE A BUNCH OF RANDOM ATOMS, SCATTERED FROM HERE TO THE FARTHEST GALAXY... OR HE COULD BE STANDING ALONE AND UNARMED ON A WILD, PRIMITIVE PLANET WHICH SHOULD SUIT HIM FAR BETTER THAN THIS ONE, SHOULD HE SURVIVE IT.
OH, BY THE BY... HE MADE ME TELEPORT HIM THERE, DON'T YOU KNOW? THREATENED ME AND ALL THAT.
YOU DO BELIEVE ME, DON'T YOU?
AFTER ALL, I'M ONLY A POOR OLD MAN, LIVING HERE ALL ALONE...!

Even in this dictaphone journal, which is for no ears save my own, I will not elaborate upon my Great Secret -- nor upon the means by which I later achieved communication with that unhappy fugitive, upon a world swimming afar in space... alien, aloof, strange.
Suffice it to say that, in time, I heard the story from his own lips, whispering eerily across the cosmos.
I write, from this point, in Esau Cairn's own words:
ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE: "The transition was so swift that it seemed less than a tick of time between the moment I placed myself in Professor Hildebrand's weird machine...
"...and the instant when I found myself standing upright in the clear sunlight that flooded a broad and somehow unearthly plain.

"It is an awesome sensation to be suddenly hurled from one's native world into a strange, new alien sphere... and I, who had never known fear, felt for the first time that utter helplessness which other men know.
"At least it was no world of ice and snow into which I had fallen, and the warmth of an unknown sun was pleasant on my bare limbs.
"Then, as I stood there gaping, I abruptly heard from behind me the most unexpected sound of all...
THAK! WHAT MANNER OF MAN ARE YOU?
"A gruff yet human voice-- and speaking in perfect English, or so it seemed to me at that moment!
"I whirled about--
CONRAD

ALMURIC continues on page 91

I AM OF THE SEA...
... OF THE WATER, OF MY MOTHER, OF MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
SOMETIMES IT NICER UP HERE, WHERE IT GETS HEAVY, HARD TO MOVE.
NICE TO TOUCH THE SKY, LET THE BRIGHT BALL SHINE ON ME UNTIL I FEEL THE BREEZE PLAY IN MY HAIR.
SOMETIMES NICE TO LAY ON MY BACK AND WATCH SKY SWIMMERS... THEY OF THE WIND AND CLOUDS.
SOMETIME ... NICE TO... SOAR.
MONKEY SEE
©1980 Steve Bissette & Rick Veitch

WONDER WHAT IT IS TO SWIM IN SKY...

...IF THE SKY SING TO HIM LIKE THE SEA SING TO US.

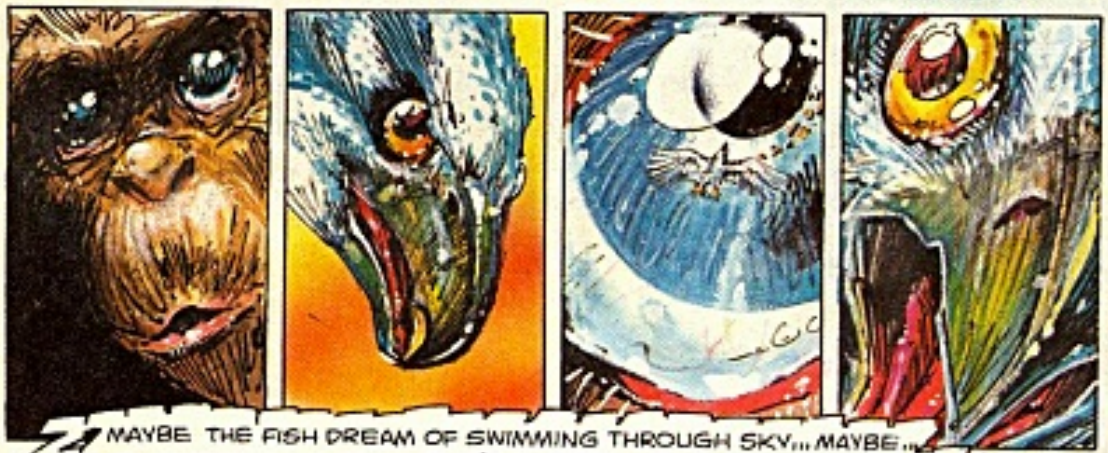
I SEE HIM SWIM THE SKY WITH HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS SOMETIMES, LIKE WHEN THEY FLOAT UPSIDE DOWN TO KISS THE SEA AND PULL FISH FROM ITS MOUTH.

HE MUST HAVE GOOD EYE TO SEE WHERE SEA HIDES FISH. I THINK SOMETIMES SEA SHOWS THEM, AND MAYBE SPIT FISH UP TO THEM, BECAUSE IT NOT SO EASY TO CATCH FISH... THEY MOVE SO FAST...

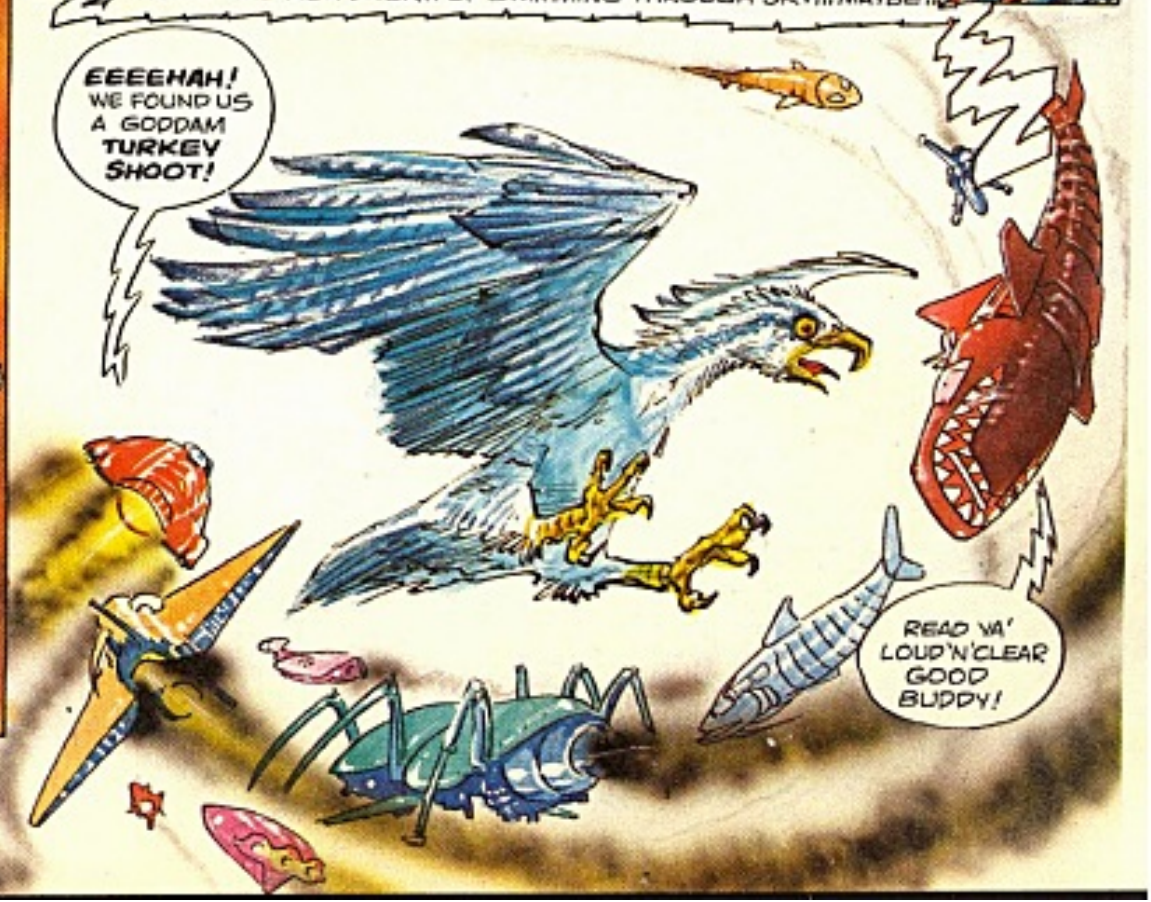
BUT MA TELLS ME NO, THEY SEE DOWN THROUGH SKY, DOWN THROUGH SEA,

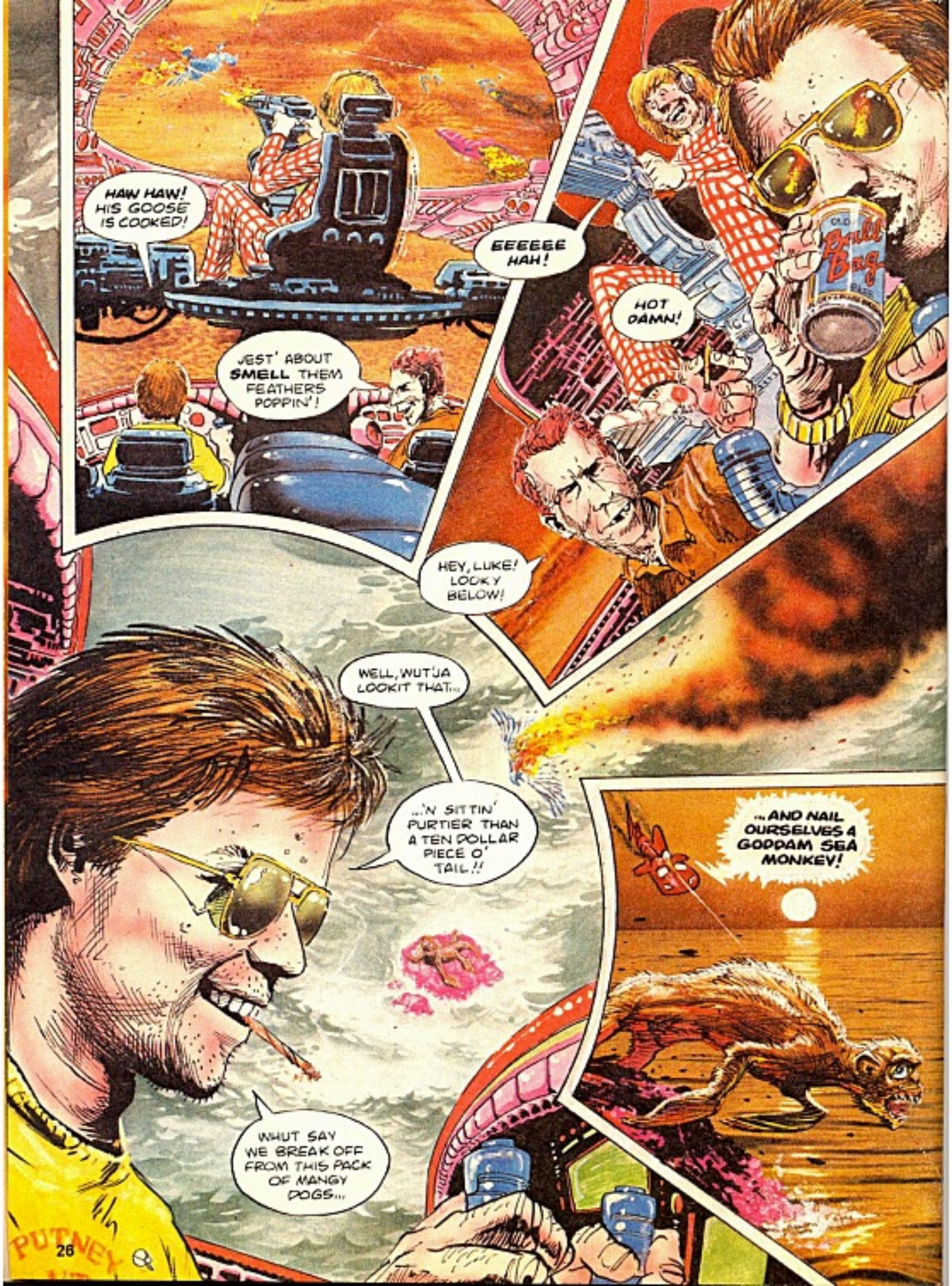
WONDER IF FISH EVER SEE HIM UP THROUGH WATER AND SKY.

ONCE I HELD FISH UP OUT OF WATER, JUST SO HE COULD SEE THE WIND, BEFORE I SWALLOW HIM... POOR FISH, ALWAYS, WHEN THEY SEE THE SKY, THEY GO STIFF AND DIE, FLOAT WITH ONE WHITE EYE TO SEA, ONE TO SKY.

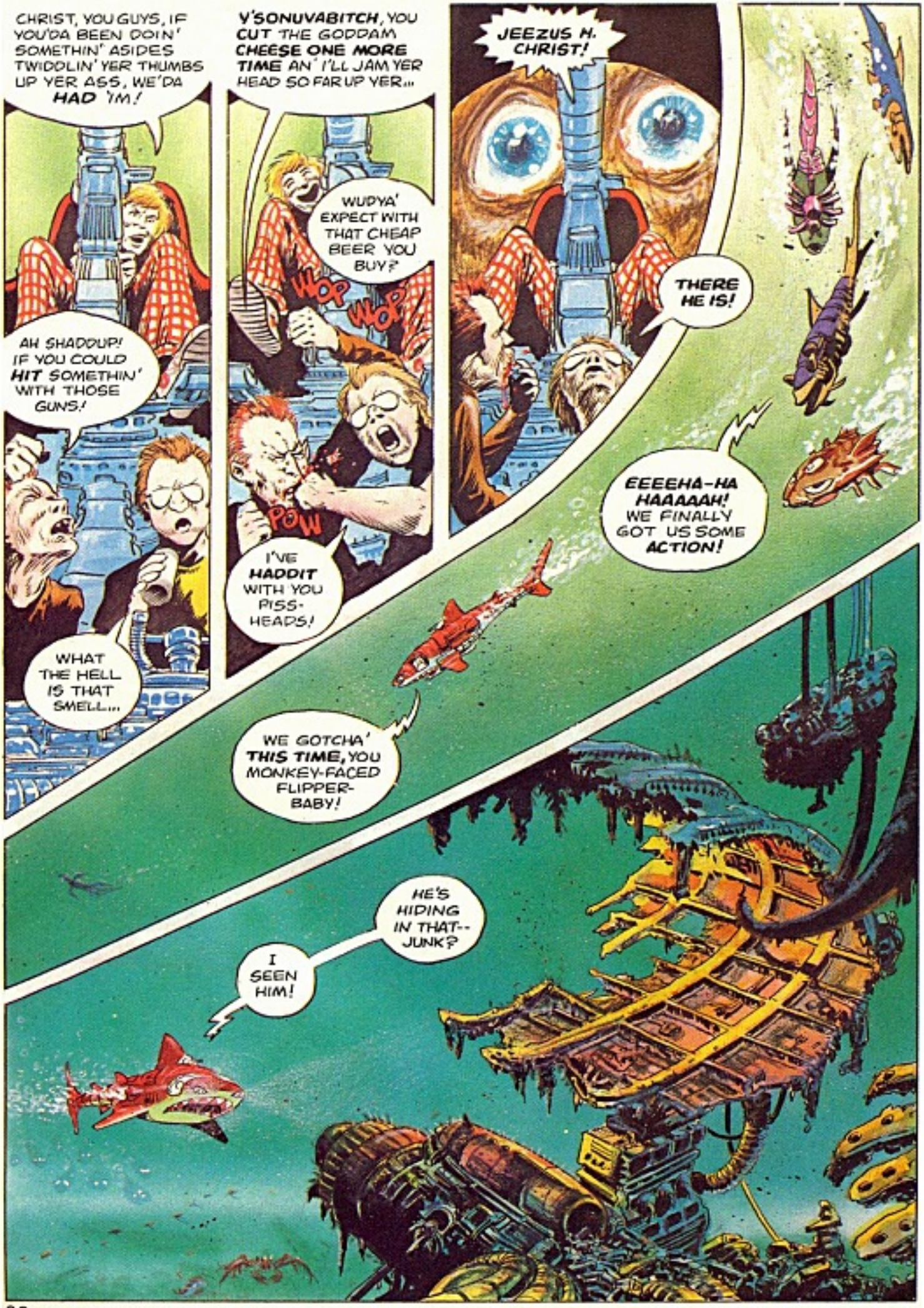


MAYBE THE FISH DREAM OF SWIMMING THROUGH SKY... MAYBE...

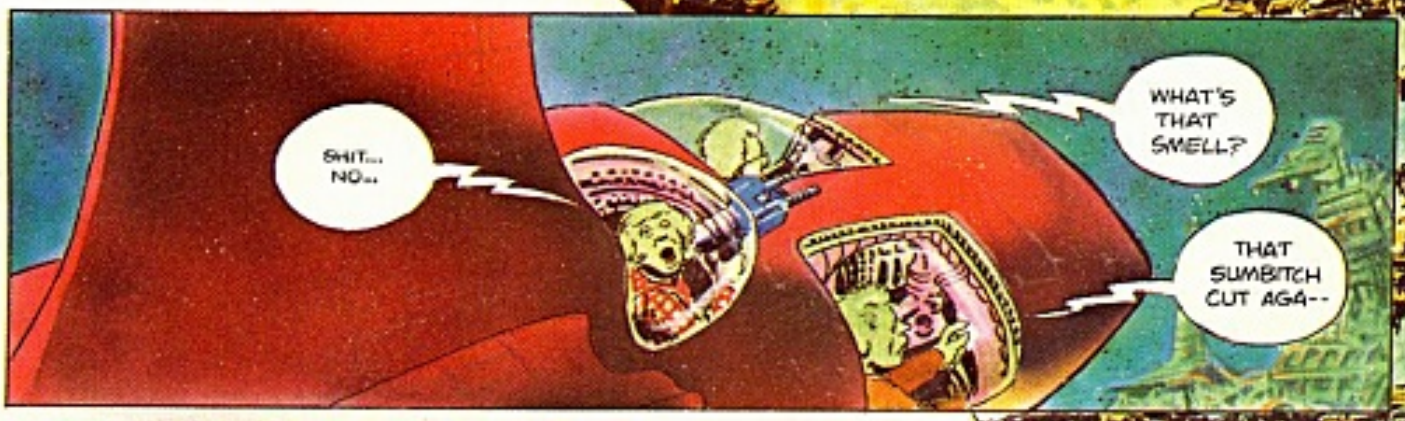



HAW HAW! HIS GOOSE IS COOKED!
JEST' ABOUT SMELL THEM FEATHERS POPPIN'!
EEEEEE HAH!
HOT DAMN!
HEY, LUKE! LOOK Y BELOW!
WELL, WUT'JA LOOKIT THAT...
...'N SITTIN' PURTIER THAN A TEN DOLLAR PIECE O' TAIL!!
WHUT SAY WE BREAK OFF FROM THIS PACK OF MANGY DOGS...
...AND NAIL OURSELVES A GODDAM SEA MONKEY!

HEY, GOOD BUDDY, WATCHA' GOT THERE?
JES' BRUSHIN' UP ON OUR TARGET PRACTICE!
WILL YOU LOOKIT THAT GOOMER... YOU KNOW HOW MUCH WE COULD GET FER THAT FUR COAT ON 'IM?
DADNABBIT!
GET THIS GODDAM CAN MOVIN'...!
WE'RE LOSIN' 'IM, YOU BASTURDS!


CHRIST, YOU GUYS, IF YOU'DA BEEN DOIN' SOMETHIN' ASIDES TWIDDLIN' YER THUMBS UP YER ASS, WE'DA HAD 'IM!
AH SHADDUP! IF YOU COULD HIT SOMETHIN' WITH THOSE GUNS!
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT SMELL...
Y'SONUVABITCH, YOU CUT THE GODDAM CHEESE ONE MORE TIME AN' I'LL JAM YER HEAD SO FAR UP YER...
WUD'YA' EXPECT WITH THAT CHEAP BEER YOU BUY?
WOP
WOP
POW
I'VE HADDIT WITH YOU PISS-HEADS!
JEEZUS H. CHRIST!
THERE HE IS!
EEEEHA-HA HAAAAAH! WE FINALLY GOT US SOME ACTION!
WE GOTCHA' THIS TIME, YOU MONKEY-FACED FLIPPER-BABY!
HE'S HIDING IN THAT-- JUNK?
I SEEN HIM!

HEY, LUKE, WHATCHA' SLOWIN' DOWN FOR?
MAYBE THE PUSSY'S SIGHTSEEIN'-- HAW! HAW! HAW!
MAN-- I-I DON'T LIKE THIS!


SHIT... NO...
WHAT'S THAT SMELL?
THAT SUMBITCH CUT AGA--

SKCHCHCHCKCRAUUUUUUUCH

THIS TIME, IT IS MY TURN TO LEAD THE FISH WHO ARE NOT FOOD BACK TO MOTHER...

... SHE WATCHES AS MY BROTHERS END THE GAME,
FBG
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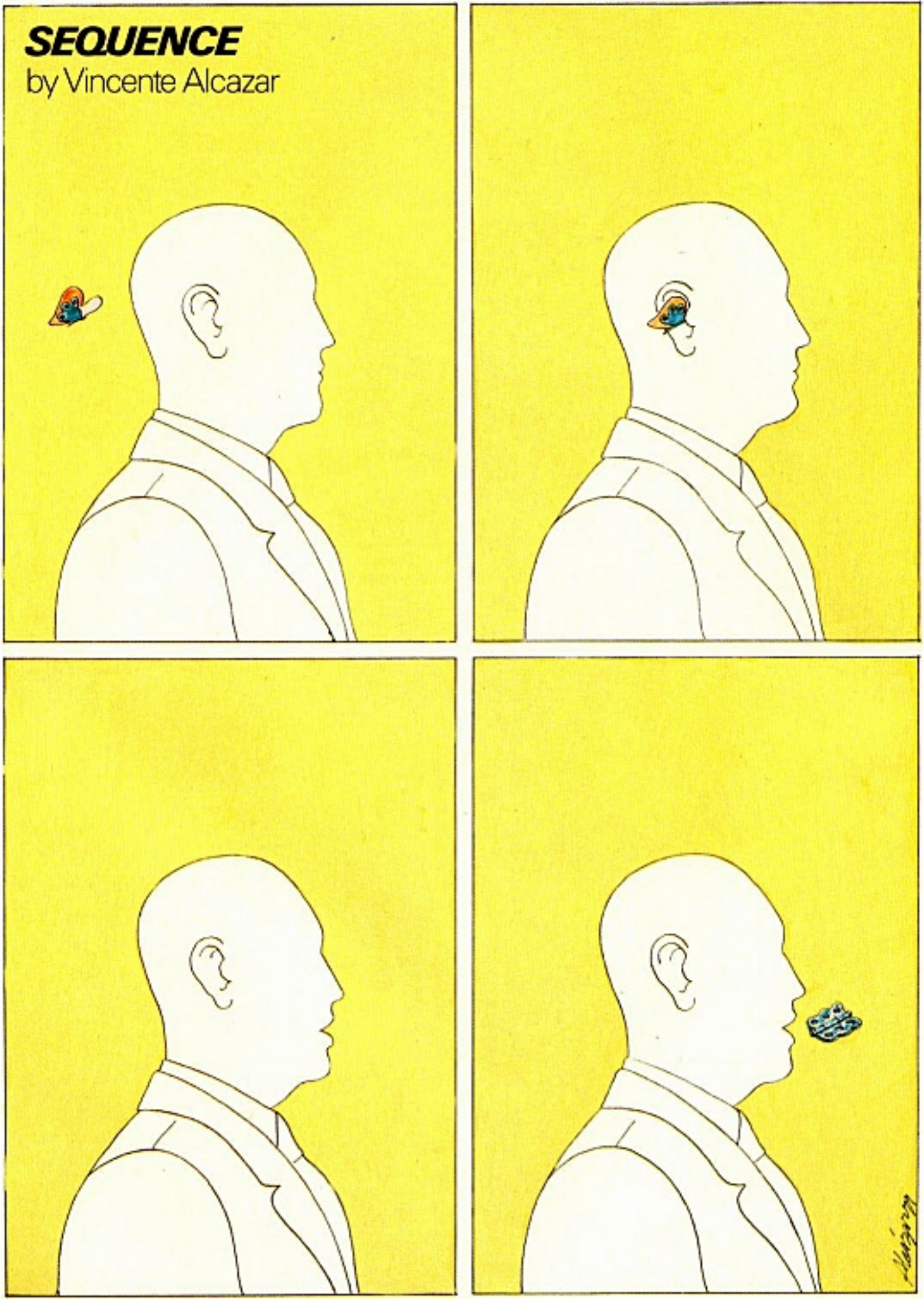
SEQUENCE

by Vincente Alcazar



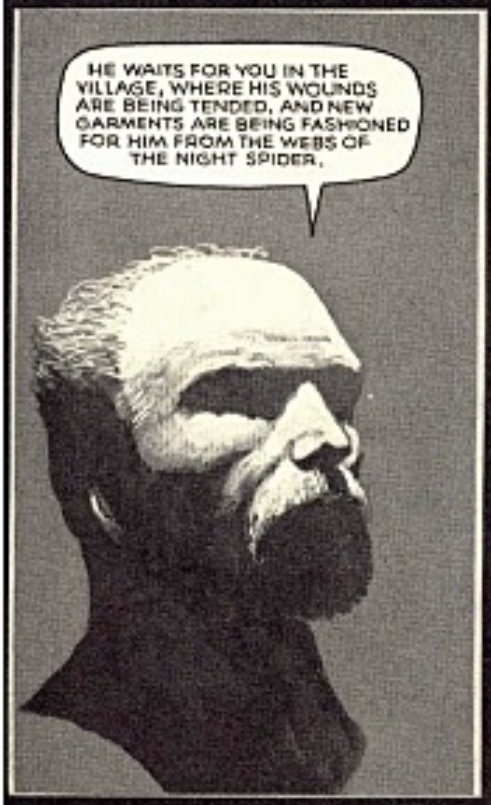
CHILD, I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
I KNOW. I SAW THE GODS COME FROM THE STARS LAST NIGHT IN MY DREAMS.
CHAPTER IV
Whispar
©1980 J.P. Starlin

THEN YOU KNOW THAT YOUR TIME HAS COME.
THE DESTINY OF OUR RACE IS ABOUT TO BE FULFILLED...

...AND YOU ARE THE INSTRUMENT OF THAT FINALITY.
I NEVER... TRULY THOUGHT IT WOULD HAPPEN IN MY LIFETIME.

BUT IT HAS, SO YOU MUST BE STRONG. THE COUNCIL OF SENSITIVES HAS CHOSEN YOU, FROM AMONG ALL THE WINGED ONES, AS THE ONE MOST IN HARMONY WITH THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THIS WORLD.

THE GOD HAS RETURNED AND AT HIS HEELS BAY THE HOUNDS OF WAR. HE HAS NEED OF YOUR PURITY.


HE WAITS FOR YOU IN THE VILLAGE, WHERE HIS WOUNDS ARE BEING TENDED, AND NEW GARMENTS ARE BEING FASHIONED FOR HIM FROM THE WEBS OF THE NIGHT SPIDER.

SO EVEN THE GODS BLEED?
I WONDER IF THEY CAN DIE ALSO?

PROBABLY...
...IT SEEMS ALL THINGS MUST EVENTUALLY END.

STEADY, GIRL. YOU MUST BE STRONG.
WE'VE SPOKEN OF THIS IN THE PAST. I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL...

... BUT YOU ARE THE CHOSEN ONE AND YOUR TIME HAS COME!
NO...

YES... YOU MUST ACCEPT IT! YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN!
NO!!

NO! THE ELDERS CHOSE WRONG. I'M NOT THE PERSON THEY NEED FOR WHAT IS COMING.
MY FAITH IS WEAK...

I HAVE DOUBTS.
SERIOUS DOUBTS.

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY YOU WERE CHOSEN.

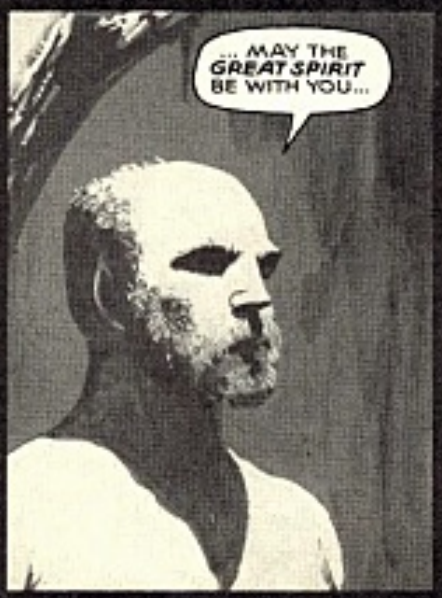
THERE MUST ALWAYS BE THOSE WHO QUESTION THE ULTIMATE TRUTH AND DIVINE EDICT.

THAT SOMEONE, THIS TIME, IS YOU, CHILD...
...I AM TRULY SORRY.

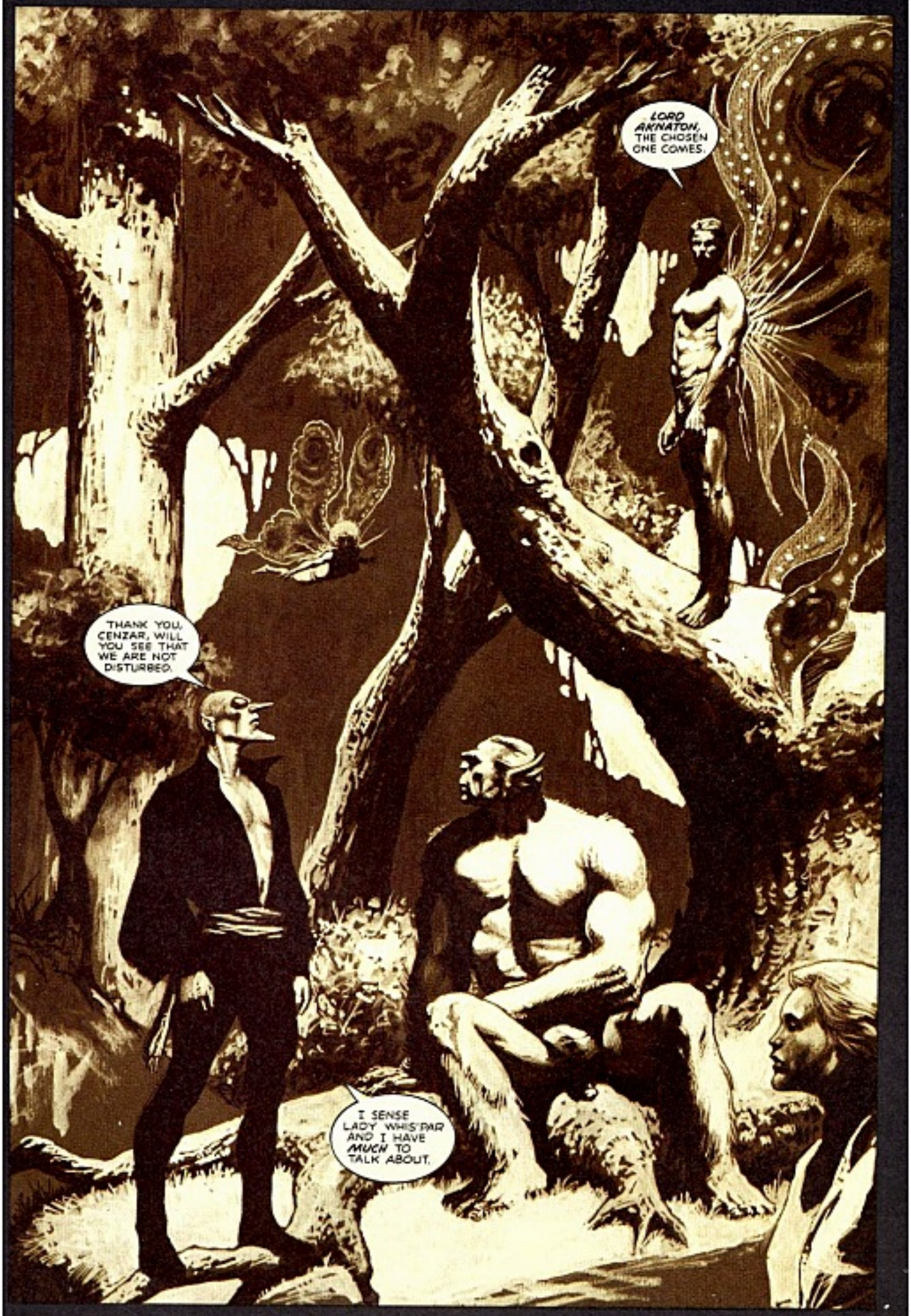
BUT HOW CAN I LEAVE, KNOWING WHAT LIES AHEAD, FATHER? HOW?!
BY NOT LOOKING BACK AND BY REALIZING THERE ARE THINGS IN THIS WORLD MORE IMPORTANT THAN PERSONAL COMFORT AND DESIRE.
WHEN THESE THINGS CALL, YOU MUST ANSWER.

GOODBYE, WHIS'PAR.

WHIS'PAR...


... MAY THE GREAT SPIRIT BE WITH YOU...

... AND MAY IT FORGIVE US ALL.


LORD AKNATON, THE CHOSEN ONE COMES.
THANK YOU, CENZAR, WILL YOU SEE THAT WE ARE NOT DISTURBED.
I SENSE LADY WHIS'PAR AND I HAVE MUCH TO TALK ABOUT.

GREETINGS, LADY *WHIS'PAR*, DAUGHTER OF GROMLIN AND CHOSEN ONE OF THE WORLD OF THE WOODS. I WELCOME YOU TO OUR *COMRADESHIP*.

AS WOULD I, LASS.

THANK YOU LORD CREATOR, BUT I WOULD BE *FALSE* IF I DID NOT TELL YOU...

...THAT THERE ARE *MANY* OTHER PLACES I WOULD RATHER BE RIGHT NOW.

THE TROUBLE IS MANY OF THOSE PREFERRED PLACES NO LONGER EXIST THANKS TO THE ZYGOTEANS.

THAT IS WHY THE FATES HAVE GATHERED US THIS DAY. WE ARE HERE TO HERALD THE END OF A GALACTIC MADNESS...

...AND THE BIRTH OF SOMETHING NEVER BEFORE SEEN UNDER THE STARS.

YOU THREE ARE THE EMBRYO OF WHAT IS TO BE, EACH AN ASPECT.

JULIET COMES FROM A STRONG, AMBITIOUS BREED WITH THE GIFT OF *YOUTHFUL INNOCENCE* STILL INTACT.

ZA BRINGS WITH HIM THE PROOF THAT SOMETHING *BEAUTIFUL* AND *LOVING* CAN GROW FROM THE NIGHTMARE OF REALITY.

WHILE YOU, WHIS'PAR, GIVE THE FATEFUL TRIO GENERATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL *HARMONY* AND THE *WISDOM* THAT COMES WITH IT.

THUS, THE CHILD OF THIS UNION IS BLESSED WITH A CLEAN SPIRIT, A GENTLE SOUL AND THE ADVANTAGE OF EXPERIENCE.

SUCH AN OFFSPRING MUST SURELY PROVE TO BE A *NOBLE* AND *UNSTOPPABLE* FOE TO THE ZYGOTEAN MADNESS...

...ESPECIALLY WHEN COUPLED WITH MY *MAGICS*.

BUT THE COST OF SUCH A CREATION, MY LORD...

...THE COST?

THE CHILD ALSO HAS THE POWER TO *DOUBT*...

THEN YOU KNOW?

MY *RACE* IS THE CHILD OF *YOUR* POWER, HOW COULD WE NOT KNOW?

THEN YOU MUST ALSO KNOW THAT TO DO *NOTHING* WOULD BE *WORST*.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO TALKING ABOUT, MASTER?

WE ARE TALKING ABOUT *CONSCIENCE* AND *RESPONSIBILITY*, ZA.

RESPONSIBILITY, CONSCIENCE, AND OTHER CRIMES.

METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY continues next issue

SIEGFRIED AND THE DRAGON

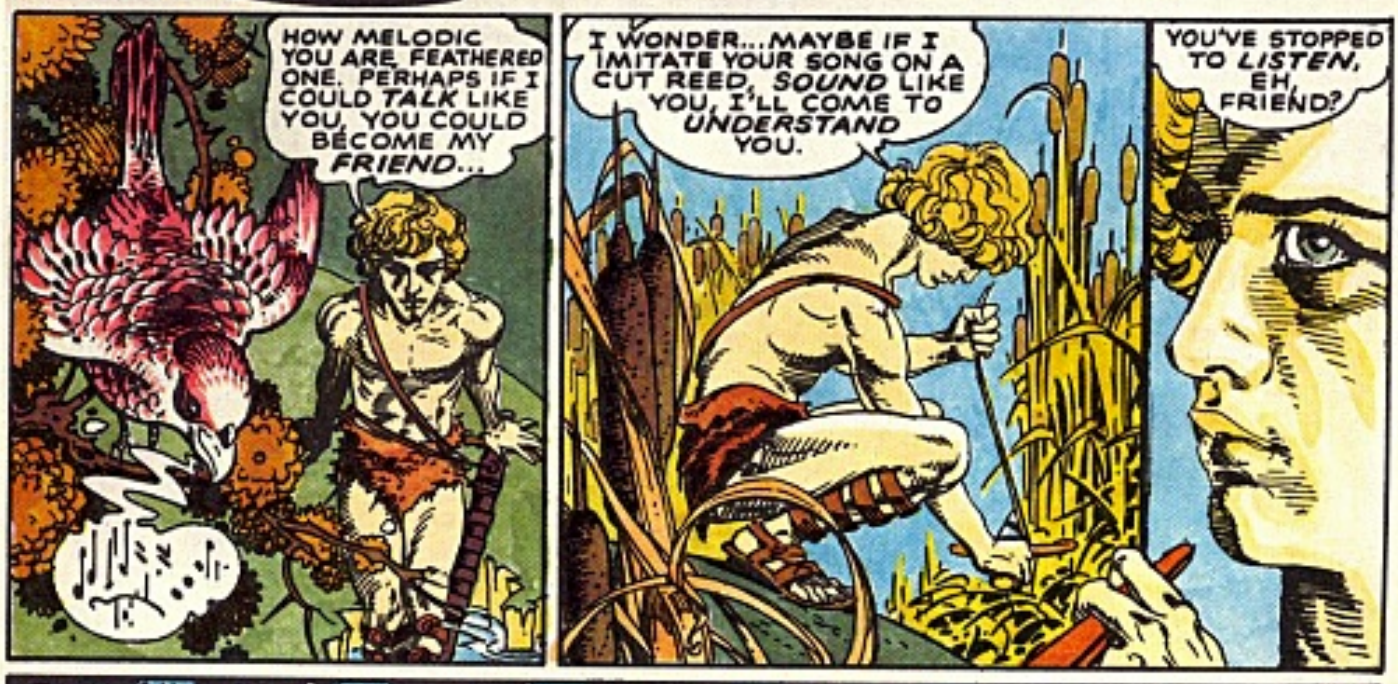
ART BY P. CRAIG RUSSELL

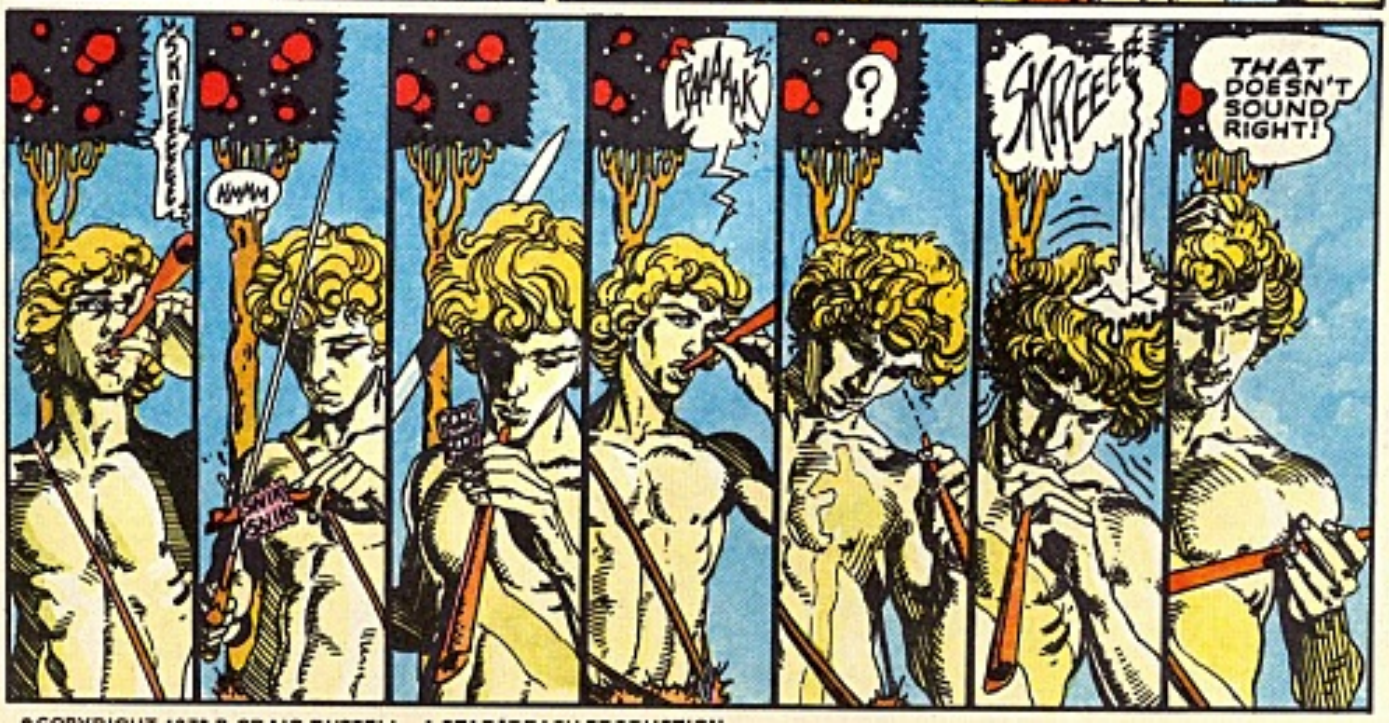
FROM THE STORY BY RICHARD WAGNER
THANKS TO CHUCK POWELL AS SIEGFRIED
LETTERING BY C. RUSSELL AND MARY E. GORDON

THE STORY-

SIXTEEN YEAR OLD SIEGFRIED, YOUNG, ARROGANT, YET HEROIC, NEARS THE CAVE OF THE DRAGON FAFNIR. THIS INNOCENT YOUTH HAS BEEN RAISED IN SYLVAN ISOLATION BY THE MALEVOLENT DWARF MIME.

AS THIS FRAGMENT OPENS, SIEGFRIED HAS BEEN SENT TO THE DRAGON BY MIME TO LEARN THE MEANING OF FEAR. AH, INNOCENCE, LET US FOLLOW YOUR PATH...





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THE WORDS OF BIRDS ARE NOT EASILY LEARNED, I MUST SAY. I DO KNOW MY *HORN*, THOUGH. PERHAPS THIS TIME A *FRIEND* WILL ANSWER IT, AND TELL ME WHAT MY HEART YEARNS TO KNOW.
TA TA TA TA TA TA
...?
DEEP, HEAVY HARMONICS PENETRATE DEEPLY THE FOREST—AND THE CAVE. A THICK-LIDDED EYE OPENS...
TA TA TA TA TA TA TA TA
GRRRRRRuuuuuMMMMM
TA TA TA TA
RRRRRRRRRRRR
SNIFF SNIFF
...A HEAVY HEAD IS RAISED, THROAT RUMBLING, NOSTRILS HIGH TO LOCATE THE INTRUDER...

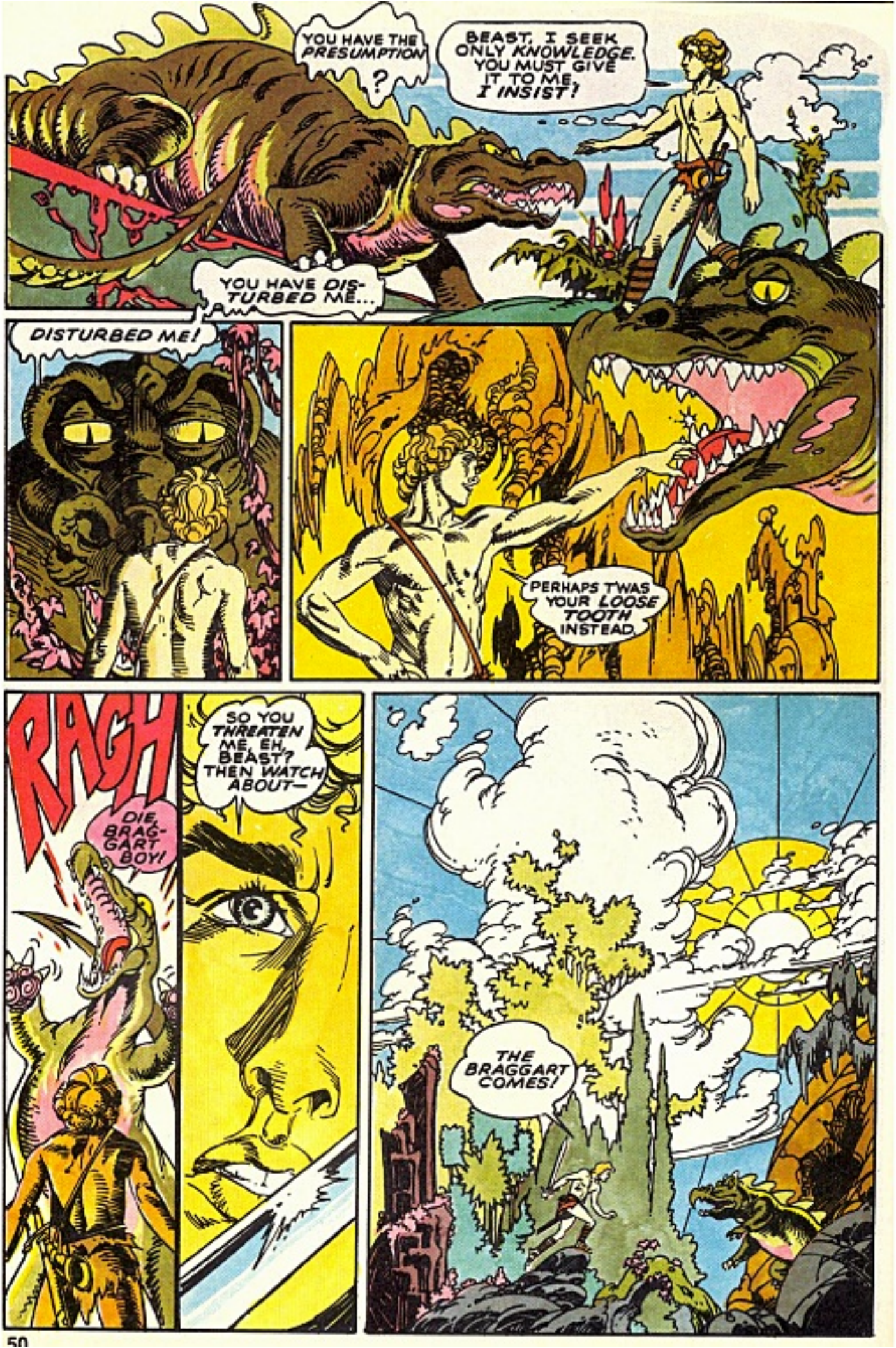
OH, HO! YOU'D MAKE A PRETTY FRIEND, I MUST SAY. YOU MUST BE WHO MIME HAS SENT ME TO SEE.

AND WHO-O-O IS THIS?

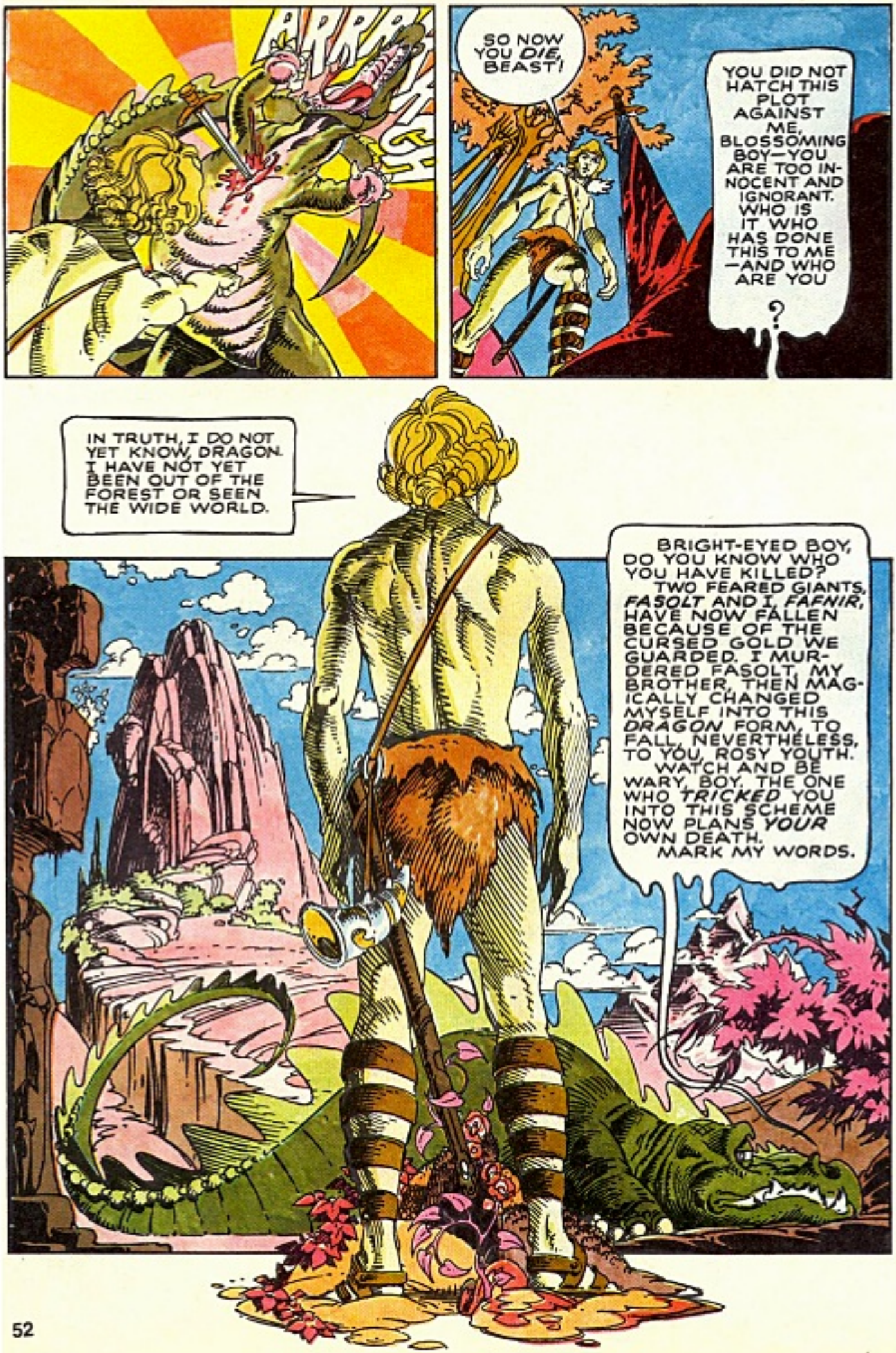
SO! YOU'RE A BEAST WHO CAN *TALK*. PERHAPS I CAN *LEARN* SOMETHING FROM YOU.

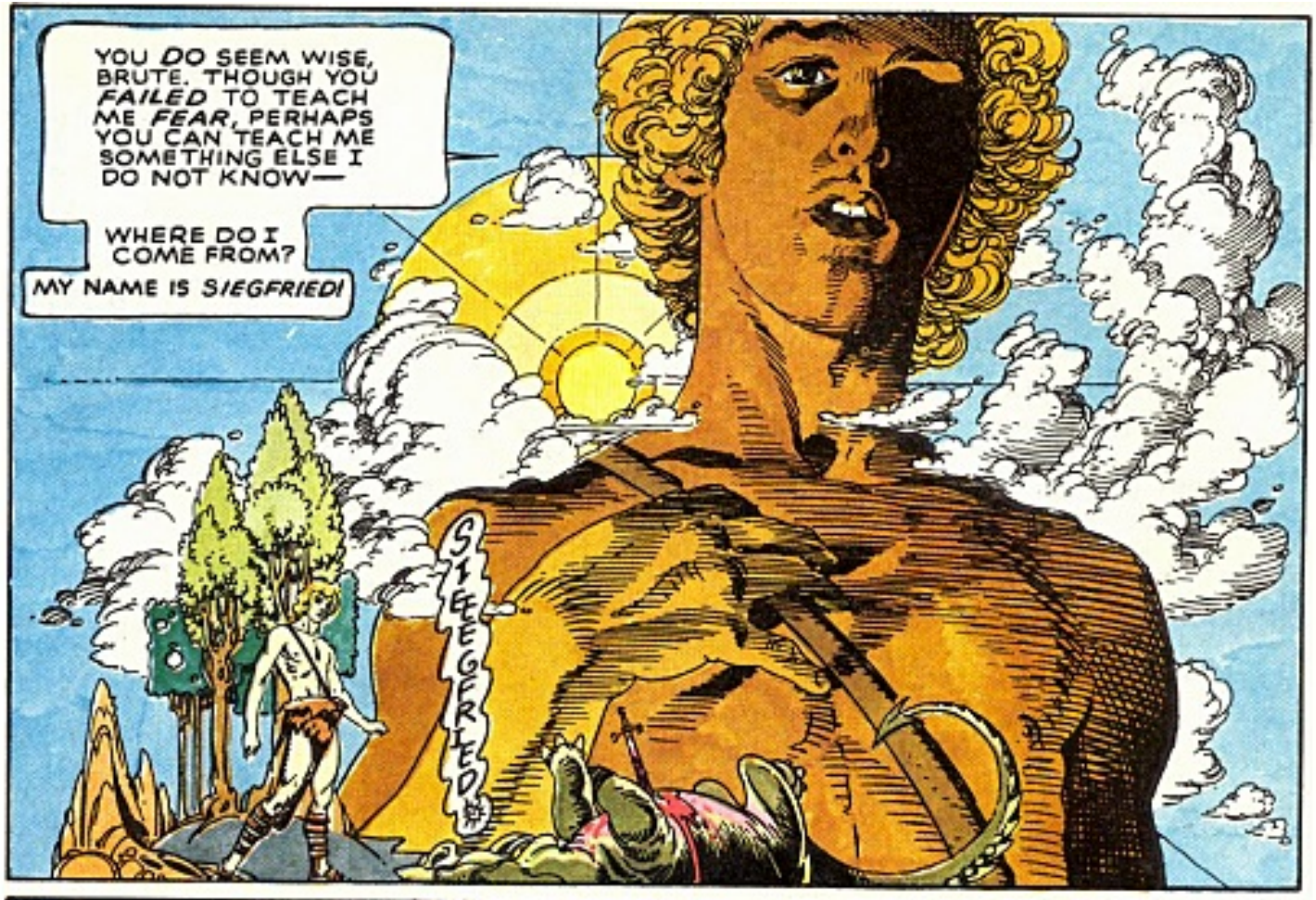
HERE IS ONE WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHAT THIS THING CALLED *FEAR* IS, BEAST...

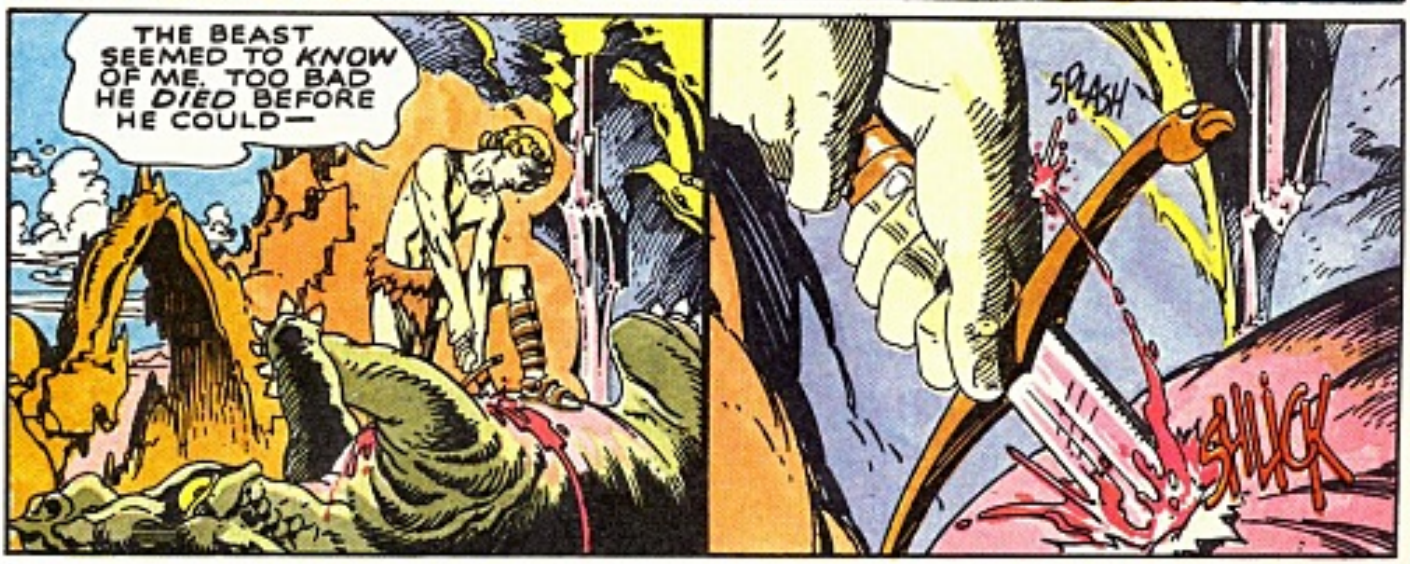
CAN *YOU* TEACH ME?


YOU HAVE THE PRESUMPTION ?
BEAST, I SEEK ONLY KNOWLEDGE. YOU MUST GIVE IT TO ME, I INSIST!
YOU HAVE DISTURBED ME...
DISTURBED ME!
PERHAPS TWAS YOUR LOOSE TOOTH INSTEAD.
RAGH
DIE, BRAGGART BOY!
SO YOU THREATEN ME, EH, BEAST? THEN WATCH ABOUT—
THE BRAGGART COMES!

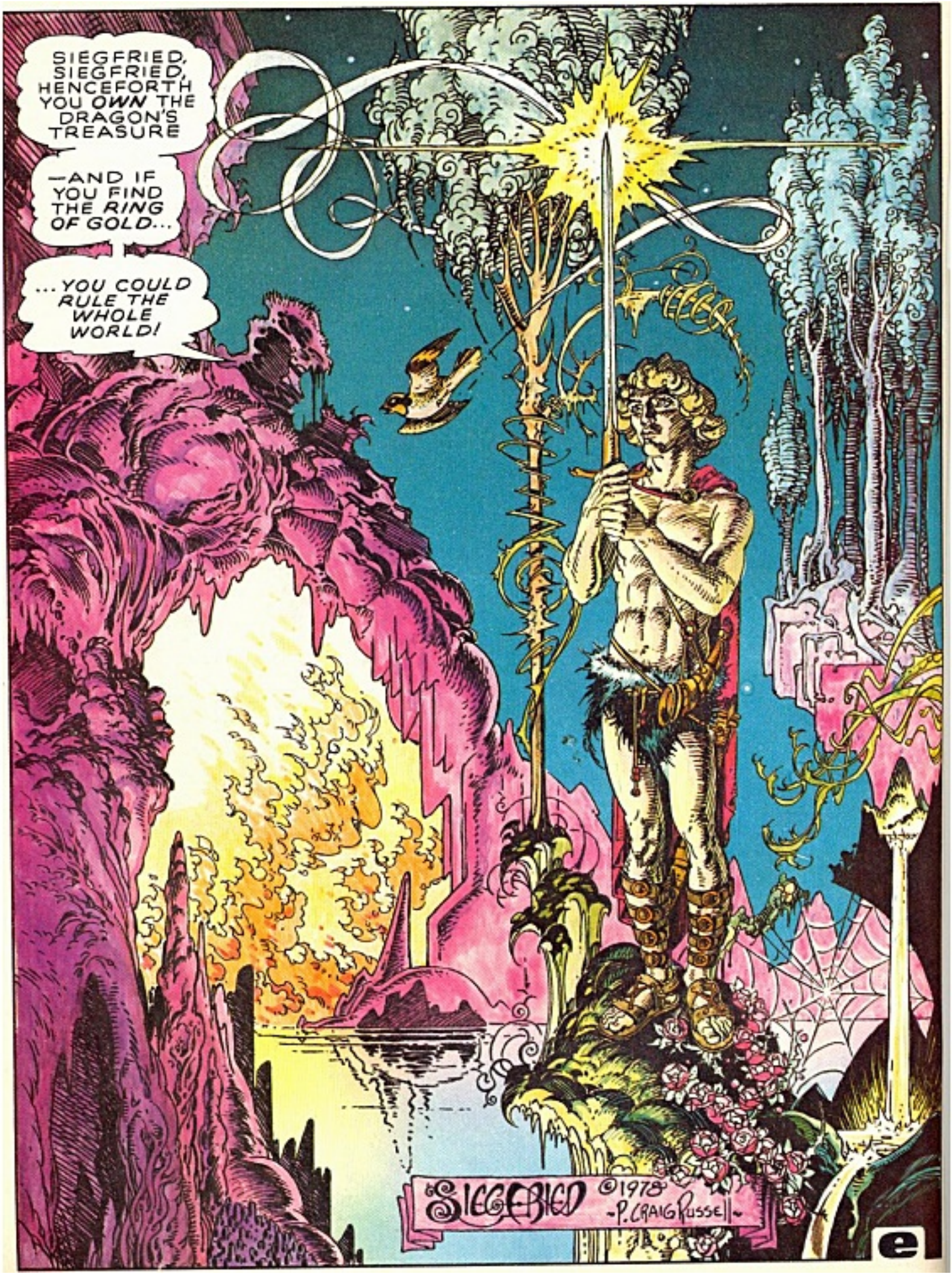
...AND YOU'LL NEED MORE THAN AN ILL-AIMED TAIL TO...
WHIP
SLICE
RAAAAPP


ARRRRGGGH
SO NOW YOU DIE, BEAST!
YOU DID NOT HATCH THIS PLOT AGAINST ME, BLOSSOMING BOY—YOU ARE TOO INNOCENT AND IGNORANT. WHO IS IT WHO HAS DONE THIS TO ME—AND WHO ARE YOU ?
IN TRUTH, I DO NOT YET KNOW, DRAGON. I HAVE NOT YET BEEN OUT OF THE FOREST OR SEEN THE WIDE WORLD.
BRIGHT-EYED BOY, DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU HAVE KILLED? TWO FEARED GIANTS, FASOLT AND I, FAFNIR, HAVE NOW FALLEN BECAUSE OF THE CURSED GOLD WE GUARDED. I MURDERED FASOLT, MY BROTHER, THEN MAGICALLY CHANGED MYSELF INTO THIS DRAGON FORM, TO FALL, NEVERTHELESS, TO YOU, ROSY YOUTH. WATCH AND BE WARY, BOY. THE ONE WHO TRICKED YOU INTO THIS SCHEME NOW PLANS YOUR OWN DEATH. MARK MY WORDS.


YOU DO SEEM WISE, BRUTE. THOUGH YOU FAILED TO TEACH ME FEAR, PERHAPS YOU CAN TEACH ME SOMETHING ELSE I DO NOT KNOW—
WHERE DO I COME FROM?
MY NAME IS SIEGFRIED!
SIEEEGFRIED!


THE BEAST SEEMED TO KNOW OF ME. TOO BAD HE DIED BEFORE HE COULD—
SPLASH
SHLICK

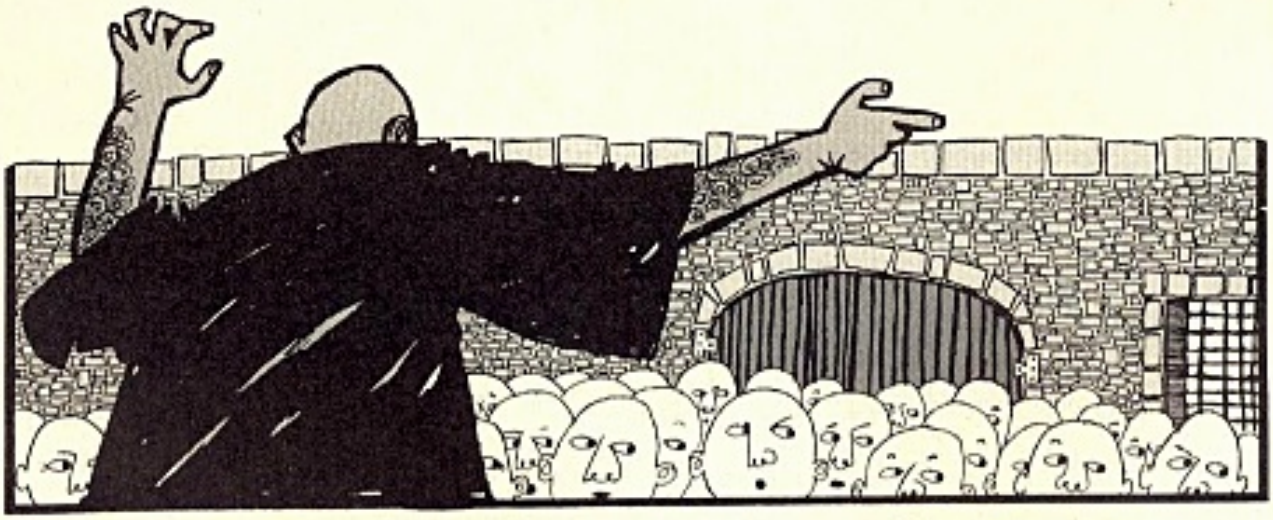
OW! THE BLOOD BURNS— LIKE FIRE!
IT WAS BEWITCHED! I... CAN NOW UNDERSTAND THE BIRD'S SINGING!


SIEGFRIED, SIEGFRIED, HENCEFORTH YOU OWN THE DRAGON'S TREASURE
—AND IF YOU FIND THE RING OF GOLD...
...YOU COULD RULE THE WHOLE WORLD!
SIEGFRIED ©1978 -P. CRAIG RUSSELL-

IT WAS TOMORROW. THE GREAT WAR SO LONG FEARED WAS OVER. DESPITE TREMENDOUS EFFORT FROM ALL PARTICIPANTS, THERE WERE SURVIVORS. THEY WERE SO SCARCE THAT WAR WAS ABANDONED. IN FACT, IT WAS COMPLETELY DISCOURAGED. THE PEOPLE GATHERED IN SMALL COMMUNITIES TO PRACTICE PEACE AND WORSHIP GOD. SUCH WAS HAPPY VALLEY ...

THE PEOPLE MET ONCE A WEEK TO PRAISE GOD. THEY SANG THE FEW PRE-WAR HYMNS REMEMBERED: "PADRE," "CRYING IN THE CHAPEL," "I BELIEVE." BUT TODAY THEY WERE EXCITED. THEY RUSHED THROUGH THE SACRED HYMNS. TODAY WAS SPECIAL ...

THE PREACHER ADDRESSED HIS PEOPLE. IT WAS A SAD DAY FOR HAPPY VALLEY. A DEFILER WAS IN THEIR MIDST! ONE OF THE VALLEY'S SHEEP HAD STRAYED FROM THE PATHS OF GOD AND WAS EXHIBITING MANY SIGNS OF PRE-WAR DECADENCE.



SINNER

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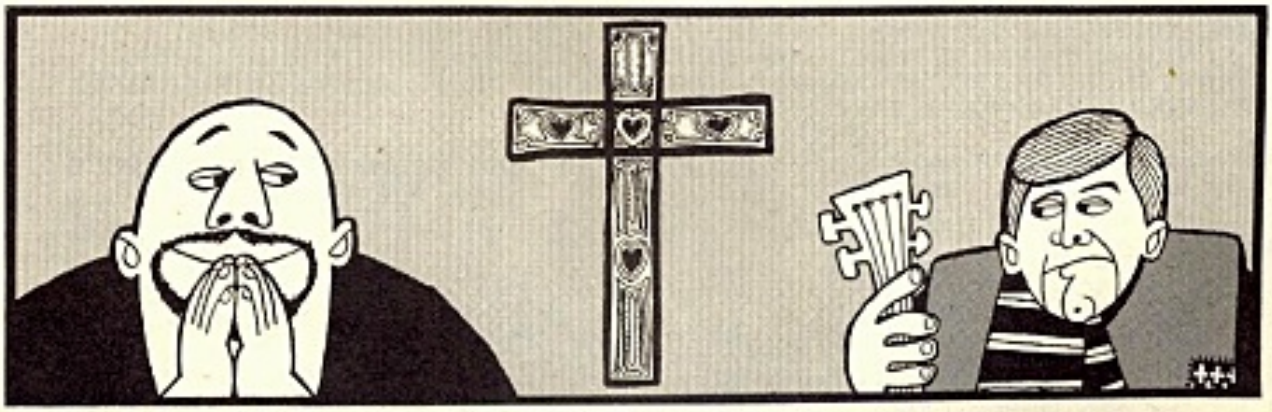
"WELL," SAID THE SINNER, "THAT'S A BIT THICK. ALL I'VE DONE IS PLAY MY GUITAR, SING, READ, AND TINKER WITH SOME OLD MACHINERY. THOSE MACHINES WOULD MAKE WORK EASIER SO WE COULD PLAY, SING, READ, AND MAYBE EVEN THINK MORE."

THE CROWD WAS SHOCKED TO HEAR SUCH BLASPHEMY. THIS WAS TRULY THE MOST EXCITING GOD'S DAY SINCE BEYOND MEMORY.

"SINNER!" CRIED THE PREACHER. "THOSE ARE PRE-WAR THOUGHTS! SLAVERY TO THE MACHINE AND IDLE PLEASURES BROUGHT THE GREAT WAR AS PUNISHMENT! WE LIVE NOW ONLY TO WORK AND WORSHIP GOD!"

"I'M AFRAID, SINNER, YOU HAVE BROKEN GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. WE MUST MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF YOU OR ELSE OTHERS MAY MAKE THE SINS OF READING, PLAYING, AND MEDDLING WITH THE MACHINES. I THINK GOD AND HAPPY VALLEY WILL AGREE THAT YOU MUST BE HANGED!"



"AMEN!" SAID THE CONGREGATION, "GLORY! HALLELUJAH!" THIS WAS MORE THAN ANYONE HAD HOPED FOR, A CHANCE TO SEE GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ACTION! AND EVERYONE IN HAPPY VALLEY COULD BE AVENGING SWORDS!

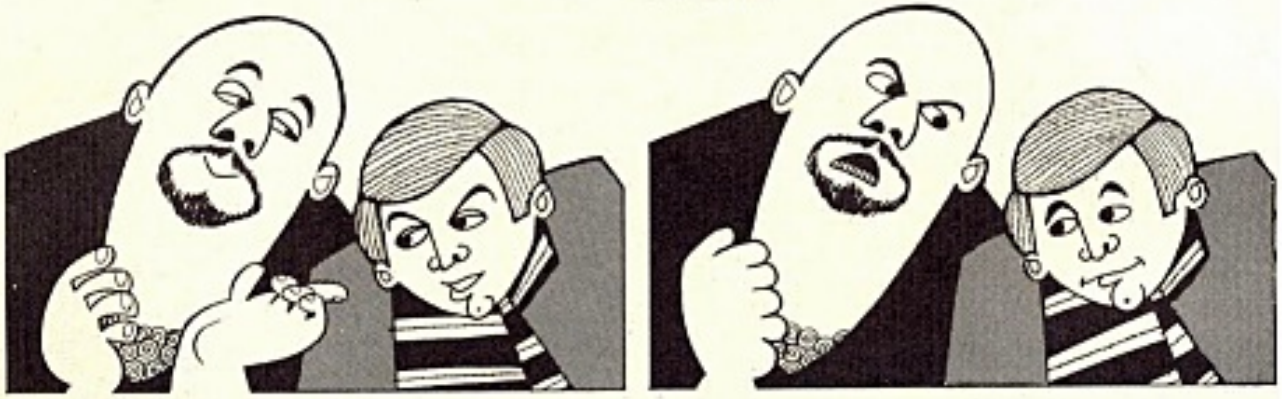
"BUT FIRST," SAID THE PREACHER, "WE MUST MAKE SURE GOD WANTS US TO HANG THE SINNER." SOME OF THE LESS FAITHFUL MEMBERS WERE A TRIFLE DISAPPOINTED AND VOICED OBJECTIONS TO PESTERING GOD, BUT THE PREACHER CALLED FOR SILENCE. "GOD," SAID THE PREACHER, "IF WE SHOULDN'T HANG THIS SINNER, GIVE US A SIGN." THERE WAS A LONG SIGNLESS PAUSE ...

"GOD WANTS TO HANG THE SINNER. ANY LAST WORDS, SINNER?"

"I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D LET ME ASK GOD FOR A FEW SIGNS?"

"HE'D SEND DEATH AND DESTRUCTION ON US FOR ALLOWING SUCH A BLASPHEMER TO CALL UPON HIM!"

"I KIND OF THOUGHT IT MIGHT WORK OUT LIKE THAT ..."

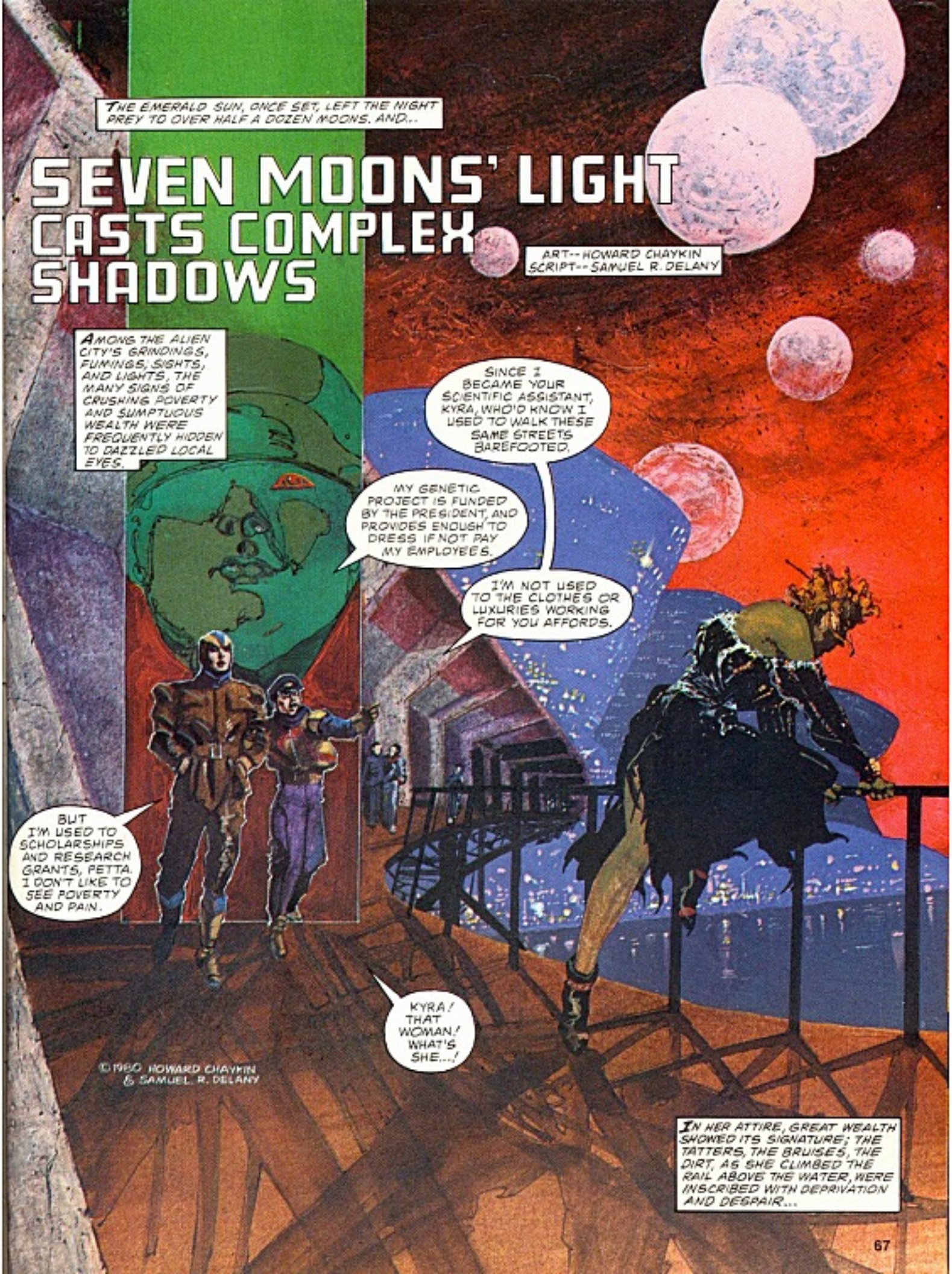


THE SINNER LOOKED AT THE PEOPLE OF HAPPY VALLEY. "THE VERY WORST THING ABOUT DYING IS THAT YOU STOP BUT THE REST OF THE WORLD GOES RIGHT ON AND YOU MISS ALL THE WONDERFUL CHANGES THAT WILL COME AFTER YOU. DYING CAN BE EASIER IF YOU KNOW PERHAPS YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING THAT WILL HELP THE WORLD GROW AND CHANGE. FORTUNATELY, HAPPY VALLEY WON'T CHANGE. YOU'LL GO ON WORKING AND WORSHIPPING GOD, AND DOING NO PRE-WAR EVIL, AND I CAN DIE KNOWING I DIDN'T HELP THIS NON-CHANGE. IN FACT, I AGREE—HANGING ME IS A PRETTY GOOD IDEA!"

BEING GOD-FEARING FOLK AND TRUE TO THEIR WORD, THE CONGREGATION PROMPTLY HANGED THE SINNER. ALL IN ALL IT HAD BEEN AN EXHILARATING WORSHIP SERVICE ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SOME DISSATISFACTION DUE TO THE SINNER'S EXTREME WILLINGNESS TO BE HANGED.

THEY BURIED HIM NEAR THE ENTRANCE OF THE VALLEY AND MARKED HIS GRAVE WITH ONE OF THE OLD SYMBOLS OF PRE-WAR DECADENCE AS A WARNING TO ALL OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THOSE WHO SIN BY PLAYING AND READING, AND TRYING TO REVIVE THE MACHINE ...

GOD WAS IN HIS HEAVEN AND ALL WAS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD—ESPECIALLY IN HAPPY VALLEY.


THE EMERALD SUN, ONCE SET, LEFT THE NIGHT PREY TO OVER HALF A DOZEN MOONS. AND...
SEVEN MOONS' LIGHT CASTS COMPLEX SHADOWS
ART-- HOWARD CHAYKIN
SCRIPT-- SAMUEL R. DELANY
AMONG THE ALIEN CITY'S GRINDINGS, FUMINGS, SIGHTS, AND LIGHTS, THE MANY SIGNS OF CRUSHING POVERTY AND SUMPTUOUS WEALTH WERE FREQUENTLY HIDDEN TO DAZZLED LOCAL EYES.
SINCE I BECAME YOUR SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANT, KYRA, WHO'D KNOW I USED TO WALK THESE SAME STREETS BAREFOOTED.
MY GENETIC PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE PRESIDENT, AND PROVIDES ENOUGH TO DRESS IF NOT PAY MY EMPLOYEES.
I'M NOT USED TO THE CLOTHES OR LUXURIES WORKING FOR YOU AFFORDS.
BUT I'M USED TO SCHOLARSHIPS AND RESEARCH GRANTS, PETTA. I DON'T LIKE TO SEE POVERTY AND PAIN.
KYRA! THAT WOMAN! WHAT'S SHE...!
©1980 HOWARD CHAYKIN & SAMUEL R. DELANY
IN HER ATTIRE, GREAT WEALTH SHOWED ITS SIGNATURE; THE TATTERS, THE BRUISES, THE DIRT, AS SHE CLIMBED THE RAIL ABOVE THE WATER, WERE INSCRIBED WITH DEPRIVATION AND DESPAIR...

ON THE ALIEN ENBANKMENT, LIFE AND DEATH, POSSIBILITY AND POSSIBILITY DENIED PLAYED OUT BEFORE ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS PROGRAMMED TO RESPOND TO NOTHING SHORT OF THREATS TO REAL PROPERTY.
RICH OR POOR, I CAN'T TELL. BUT I KNOW SHE'S STRANGE, AND I'M SCARED FOR KYRA!
NO YOU DON'T! YOU'RE COMING WITH ME!
PLEASE, LET ME DIE! I'M NOTHING! I'M LESS THAN NOTHING!

THE GENETIC SCIENTIST LEADS THE DESPERATE CREATURE THROUGH THE URBAN CRUSH TO A WORN, CRUMBLING FACADE—WITH A COMPLEX ELECTRONIC LOCK, SURELY HIDING MORE THAN A TENEMENT HOVEL.

I DON'T DESERVE TO LIVE. YOU KNOW NOTHING OF ME...

I KNOW HUMAN PAIN WHEN I SEE IT.

INSIDE, THE PRESIDENT'S ARCHITECTS HAD TURNED THE RUNDOWN STORAGE SPACE INTO AN EFFICIENT GENETICS LABORATORY, WITH LUXURIANT OPEN-AIR GARDENS, WELL-APPOINTED LIBRARY AND COMFORTABLE LIVING QUARTERS.

MY EXPERIMENTS ALLOW ME TO REMOVE GENES FROM THE CELLS OF ONE CREATURE AND PUT THEM DIRECTLY INTO THE CELLS OF ANOTHER. WITH THE PROPER HARMONAL ADHESIVES, I CAN CHANGE A MONKEY INTO A MAN, A DOLPHIN INTO A DEER...

OR ONE WOMAN INTO ANOTHER. OH, YES, I KNOW THE PRESIDENT'S INTERESTS IN SUCH THINGS...

YOU SHOULD HAVE LET ME DIE.

COME, WOMAN, IS YOUR WOMB MADE FOR METAL OR MACHÉ? YOU MUST LOOK AT YOUR PROBLEMS DIRECTLY, UNDER THE CLEAR, HARSH LIGHT OF REASON.
WHEN YOU LOOK AT WHAT I HAVE HERE, YOU'LL UNDERSTAND...
THE HOLOGRAM PLATE THE DERELICT HANDED THE SCIENTIST SHOWED IN ITS SHIFTING DEPTHS A FAMILIAR FIGURE FORMING.
AS GARMENT WISPS TRANSPARED OPAQUED, CLOSED, IT WAS CLEAR THE DERELICT HERSELF WAS THE SUBJECT.
BUT THE HOLOGRAMMIC TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED...

...TILL IT WAS ONE WITH THE PRESIDENTIAL PORTRAIT ON THE SCIENTIST'S WALL.
DO YOU SEE, DO SEE NOW WHO I AM?
I REFUSE TO BELIEVE IT! YOU CAN'T BE THE PRESIDENT!
HERE, DRINK THIS, AND EXPLAIN TO ME.
NO, THE WOMAN SAID, I AM NOT THE PRESIDENT, BUT I AM ONE OF 500 IDENTICAL CLONES GROWN FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OWN GERM CELLS, GENETICALLY IDENTICAL WITH HER, WHOM SHE USES TO HELP HER RUN THIS VAST, COMPLEX WORLD. SHE USES US TO APPEAR AT CEREMONIES, SIGN DECREES, EVEN TO MAKE SMALL DECISIONS, BUT ALWAYS AS THE PRESIDENT WISHES.
I AM A WOMAN WITH NO IDENTITY OF HER OWN, A PUPPET, A WRAITH. THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO END MY WRETCHED LIFE.
WRETCHED? ONLY IF YOU CAN'T SEE THE OPPORTUNITIES...

A MOMENT OF SILENCE. KYRA, WRAPPED IN THOUGHT, STARED AT THE SPRAWL OF EQUIPMENT SHE HAD BEEN YEARS CREATING. MACHINERY OF CHANGE. GENETIC CHANGE. ONCE, IT SEEMED ENOUGH...
YET COMPARED TO WHAT A PRESIDENT MIGHT DO...! TO LOOK ON MISERY AND BRING HAPPINESS. TO BEHOLD CHAOS AND RESTORE ORDER. TO CONFRONT HELPLESSNESS AND WIELD POWER...
... CERTAINLY CHANGES A PRESIDENT COULD MAKE, IF A PRESIDENT WOULD BUT...
...ACT.!
IF YOU CAN'T LIVE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY,..THERE ARE OTHERS WHO CAN.
BUT A CRASH AT THE DOOR...
KYRA, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT..?
AND YOUNG PETTA IS NOT ALONE.
WELL MEANING FOOL! IT'S NOT POWER YOU HAVE, IT'S PERSONAL SACRIFICE, DISAPPOINTMENT, DESPAIR...

THE SCIENTIST AND HER YOUNG ASSISTANT WATCH, THEIR FACES IN THE SAME SILENT EXPRESSION, THEIR THOUGHTS MOVING IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS, UNTIL...
AH, PETTA, PERHAPS YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT THE GUARDS...
BUT, KYRA, SHE WASN'T POOR, SHE WASN'T RICH -- SHE ONLY SEEMED MAD AND I WAS AFRAID FOR YOU.
YOU'VE DONE WELL, BOY. SHE'S THE ONE WE WANTED. THE PRESIDENT'S GIVEN SPECIAL ORDERS TO GET HER BACK. WE DON'T KNOW HER IDENTITY, BUT SHE'S RUMORED TO BE A VALUABLE PLAYER IN AN IMPORTANT GAME.
YOU FOOL! ALL OF YOU, FOOLS...!
BUT AS THE GUARDS HUSTLED THE DISHEVELED WOMAN OUT THE LABORATORY DOOR, ONE TURNED BACK AND GROWLED...
VALUABLE? LOOK AT HER! YOU CAN SEE SHE'S NOBODY!

THE NIGHT WORE ON. THE EXCITEMENT SEEMED PAST. PETTA, SITTING IN HIS USUAL CORNER, PUT HIS HEAD ON HIS KNEES: "ONLY TO REST A LITTLE, KYRA." BUT HE SOON SLEPT. THE SCIENTIST, HOWEVER, STILL PACED FROM LABORATORY TO LIBRARY TO GARDEN, NOW AND AGAIN LOOKING AT HER GENETIC SAMPLING CANISTER.
WITH THIS I AM POWER... THE POWER THAT RULES THIS WORLD.
BUT I'M NO LONGER KYRA. THERE'S A CERTAIN SAFETY IN CONTINUING MY WORK, IN THE WARMTH OF ITS ANONYMITY...
ON HER NIGHT-LIT TERRACE, KYRA LOOKED UP. POSSIBILITIES LAY ALL ABOUT HER. IT WAS A MOMENT OF DECISION... BUT THEN, ALL MOMENTS ARE SUCH...
... AND THEN AGAIN, PERHAPS IT'S TIME TO SEEK OUT NEW AVENUES... TO CONSIDER OTHER MEANS...
DAMN IT. I DON'T KNOW.
ONLY FOR SOME, THE BRANCHING POSSIBILITIES ARE MORE BRILLIANTLY LIT THAN FOR OTHERS, FOR SEVEN MOONS' LIGHT CASTS COMPLEX SHADOWS...

TARN'S WORLD

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...WHERE IS THE HARM? FOR THIS IS TARN'S WORLD...
AND ALL IS--
THE FEELING COMES SHARPLY, LIKE THE PAIN OF AN OLD WOUND WHEN THE WEATHER TURNS DAMP.
SOMETHING'S WRONG.
AND ON A SMALL FARM IN THE OUTLANDS...
...IT BEGINS.
OH...!
I DIDN'T HEAR YOU RIDE UP, SIR. WHAT--
NO! IN THE NAME OF MERCY! PLEASE DON'T--
THE RIDER MOVES ON, SWIFT AS A SHADOW...
...SILENT AS DEATH.

TARN...? WHAT'S TROUBLING YOU? COME BACK TO BED. WE CAN--

NO, ALYSSA. I MUST DRESS... READY MYSELF.
FOR WHAT? SINCE YOU RESCUED ME ME FROM THE SORCEROR, NEKROS--

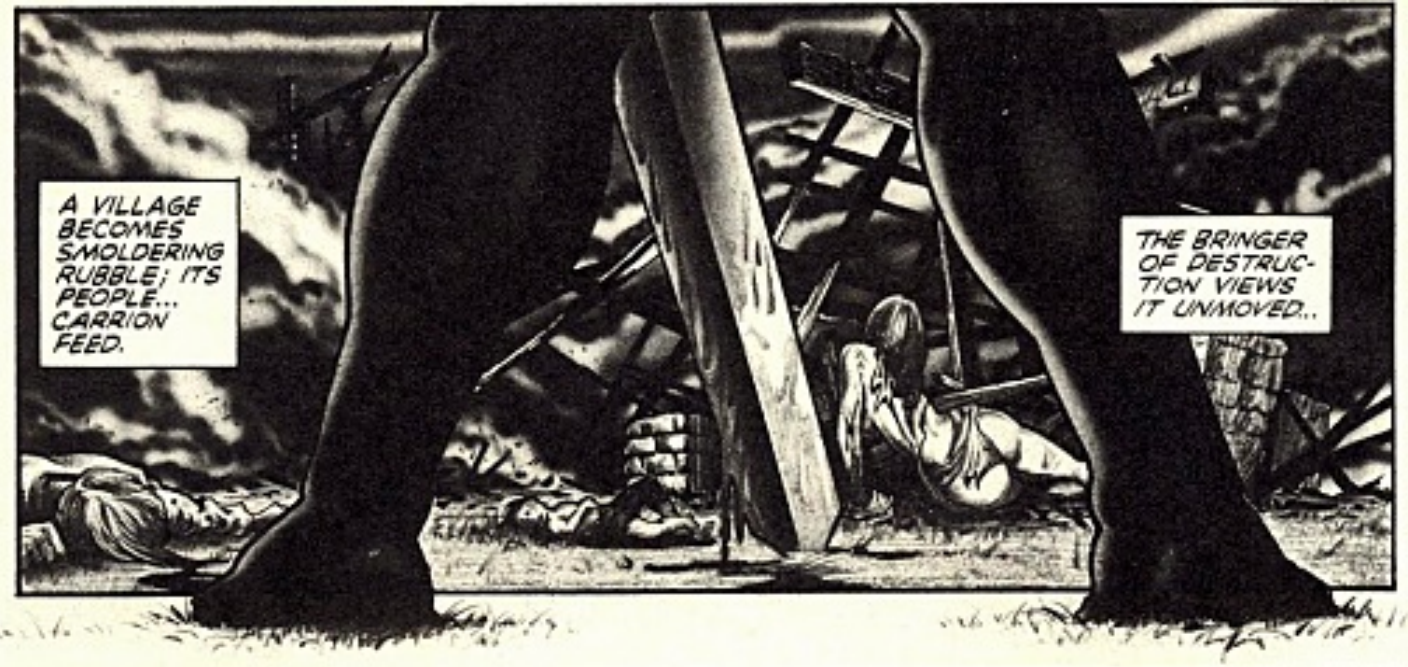
--THERE'S BEEN NO EVIL, NO THREAT TO THE LAND. PERHAPS YOU'RE LETTING A MERE DREAM--
SOMETHING'S ABROAD, ALYSSA--

--AND I MUST FACE IT.
LIKE A PLAGUE...

...THE INTRUDER SWEEPS ON...

SPARING NOTHING...

...OR NO ONE.


A VILLAGE BECOMES SMOLDERING RUBBLE; ITS PEOPLE... CARRION FEED.
THE BRINGER OF DESTRUCTION VIEWS IT UNMOVED..

...THEN, LEAPS TO HIS MOUNT, SPURRING THE ANIMAL ONWARD.

WITH STUDIED CALM, TARN PERFORMS HIS MORNING RITUALS. NO WARNING HAS COME...

...NO ALARM HAS BEEN GIVEN TO **CONFIRM** THE TERRIBLE UNEASE WITHIN HIM.

YET, EVERY GATHERED HAND MAIDEN AND SERVANT SENSES HIS TENSION... AND IT FEEDS THEIR OWN DEEP FEARS.
TARN SCOWLS INTO HIS MIRROR OF POLISHED BRONZE, FEELING AMID ALL HE HAS FOUGHT TO WIN, TO PRESERVE..
...A SLIPPING AWAY.

IN ITS PAST, THE LAND HAS KNOWN A TYRANT'S RAGE, HAS SUFFERED UNDER A SORCEROR'S BLASPHEMOUS SPELLS...
...BUT NOTHING TO COMPARE WITH THIS FORCE, THIS SCOURGE NOW SWEEPING IT.

THE MARCH IS INEXORABLE. FROM THE OUTLANDS TO THE KINGDOM'S HEART...
...ALL IS FLAME, DESTRUCTION, DEATHBIRD SHRIEKS.

AND AT ITS CENTER...THE DARK INTRUDER RAGING FOR MORE.

SMOKE-DARKENED SKIES GIVE TARN THE MESSAGE NO SCOUT, NO RUNNER HAS LIVED TO BRING.
HIS PREMONITION HAS SUBSTANCE; WHAT WAS ONCE BUT A FEELING...
...LIVES.

SLOWLY, CAREFULLY, HIS SQUIRES OUTFIT HIM IN FINEST ARMOR.
TARN DOESN'T RUSH THEM OR SHOW IMPATIENCE. EVERYTHING MUST BE PERFECT...

...FOR THEY NOW UNDERSTAND WHAT ONLY HE SUSPECTED FROM THE FIRST.
OUTSIDE, CLOSING CERTAINLY ON HIS CASTLE, IS THE GREATEST FOE OF ALL.

STILL, FOES, GREAT OR SMALL, ARE **MEANT** TO BE FACED.

RESOLUTELY, AS HE CHALLENGED THE TYRANT, GROM...

UNSWERVINGLY, AS HE FACED THE SORCEROR, NEKROS...

TARN MOVES TO BATTLE AGAIN...

AND HIS PEOPLE CHEER...

THEIR HOPE, THEIR LOVE DRAPING HIM LIKE A MANTLE...

... THAT OF SOME MORE STRONGLY THAN OTHERS.

TARN...!

ALYSSA...

THE KISS IS LONG, LINGERING... AS THOUGH, PERHAPS, THEIR LAST.

THEN, HE IS GONE, RIDING FORTH.

HIS CHARGER GROWS MORE TENSE AND SKITTISH WITH EACH STRIDE...

UNTIL HE FINDS IT BEST TO DISMOUNT, SO GREAT IS THE ANIMAL'S PANIC...

...AT THAT WHICH APPROACHES.

AS DROUGHT FOLLOWS DRY SUMMER WIND...
AS FAMINE FLIES WITH AN INSECT HORDE...
...DEATH TRAILS THE RIDER'S WAKE.
WHAT ARE YOU?
WHY HAVE YOU COME TO MY LAND?
SWIRLING DUST SETTLES. AND AT LAST TARN CAN SEE... A MAN.
RADIATING POWER LIKE THE MOST TERRIBLE OF WARRIORS...
REEKING EVIL LIKE THE VERY WORST OF SORCERORS...
A MAN. A WARRIOR. A WIZARD. AND... MORE.
LOOK CLOSELY, TARN. I'M THE END OF IT.

FOR AN AWFUL MOMENT...
...TARN BELIEVES.
THEN...
NO!
YOU HAVE FLESH, YOU HAVE FORM--
--YOU CAN BE BEATEN!
YOU'RE A DREAMER, TARN. AND THERE COMES A TIME WHEN THE DREAM--
--IS OVER!
WELL...? STRIKE! I WON'T PLEAD OR GROVEL... PARTICULARLY FOR A MONSTER SUCH AS YOU!
OH, CUT THE CRAP!
I'VE HAD IT WITH THIS ROMANTIC BULLSHIT.
HERE--

--I'LL MAKE IT EASY.
REALITY POLICE
THAT'S IT.
I KNOW--
--IT HURTS.
A JOLT OF OBJECTIVITY ALWAYS DOES.
SUBLIMINAL ENCODING ON THE CARD INDUCES IT... SORT OF JUMP-STARTS YOUR PERCEPTIONS.
WHAT...? W-WHO...?
IN WORDS PRACTICED AND OBVIOUSLY FAMILIAR, THE STRANGER REPLIES:
REALITY POLICE. JUST LIKE THE I.D. SAYS. A FRAGILE THING, REALITY... ALL THOSE ENDLESS PLANES, ALTERNATE UNIVERSES, TAKES CONSTANT PATROLLING. USUALLY, THEY RUN PARALLEL, SMOOTHLY... BUT ONCE IN A WHILE, THINGS SHIFT. REALITY LINES INTERSECT WHEN THEY SHOULDN'T.
THAT'S WHERE YOU DREAMERS BECOME A PROBLEM. YOU CARRY AROUND YOUR OWN INNER, SUBJECTIVE REALITIES. NO BIG THING... UNLESS YOU'RE AT ONE OF THOSE POINTS OF INTERSECTION. REALITIES GET MUDDLED. SOMETIMES, THE WRONG ONE, THE SUBJECTIVE ONE BECOMES DOMINANT.
Y-YOU'RE SAYING THAT--
"YOUR TRUE REALITY IS A PLACE CALLED TWENTIETH CENTURY EARTH... I'M COMMUNICATING TO YOU IN THE VERNACULAR OF THAT PLANE.
"YOU LIVE A USEFULL, ORGANIZED EXISTENCE THERE WITH YOUR WIFE, ALICE, IN A MODEST SUBURBAN HOME."
N-NO...! I'M TARN, THE WARRIOR KING! THE...
"YOU'RE THOMAS ARNSLEY. LIKE MILLIONS OF OTHERS, YOU COMMUTE EACH DAY TO WORK.
"BUT YOUR MIND OFTEN DRIFTS INTO FANTASY, DAYDREAMS... MINDWORLDS DRAWN FROM THE SWORD AND SORCERY ADVENTURES YOU VORACIOUSLY READ IN YOUR STUDENT DAYS."
AND... I JUST WORK AT... AT AN OFFICE...?
"A LARGE MARITIME INSURANCE FIRM... GROMHAM AND NECROPOLIS.
"IT'S SOMEWHAT IMPERSONAL...
"...BUT IT FULFILLS A REASONABLE FUNCTION IN THIS REALITY."

I'M SURE IT ALL COMES BACK TO YOU NOW... QUITE A CHANGE. BUT ONCE IT'S MADE, YOU WON'T REMEMBER--

--AND EVERYTHING WILL BE EXACTLY AS IT WAS, TOM.

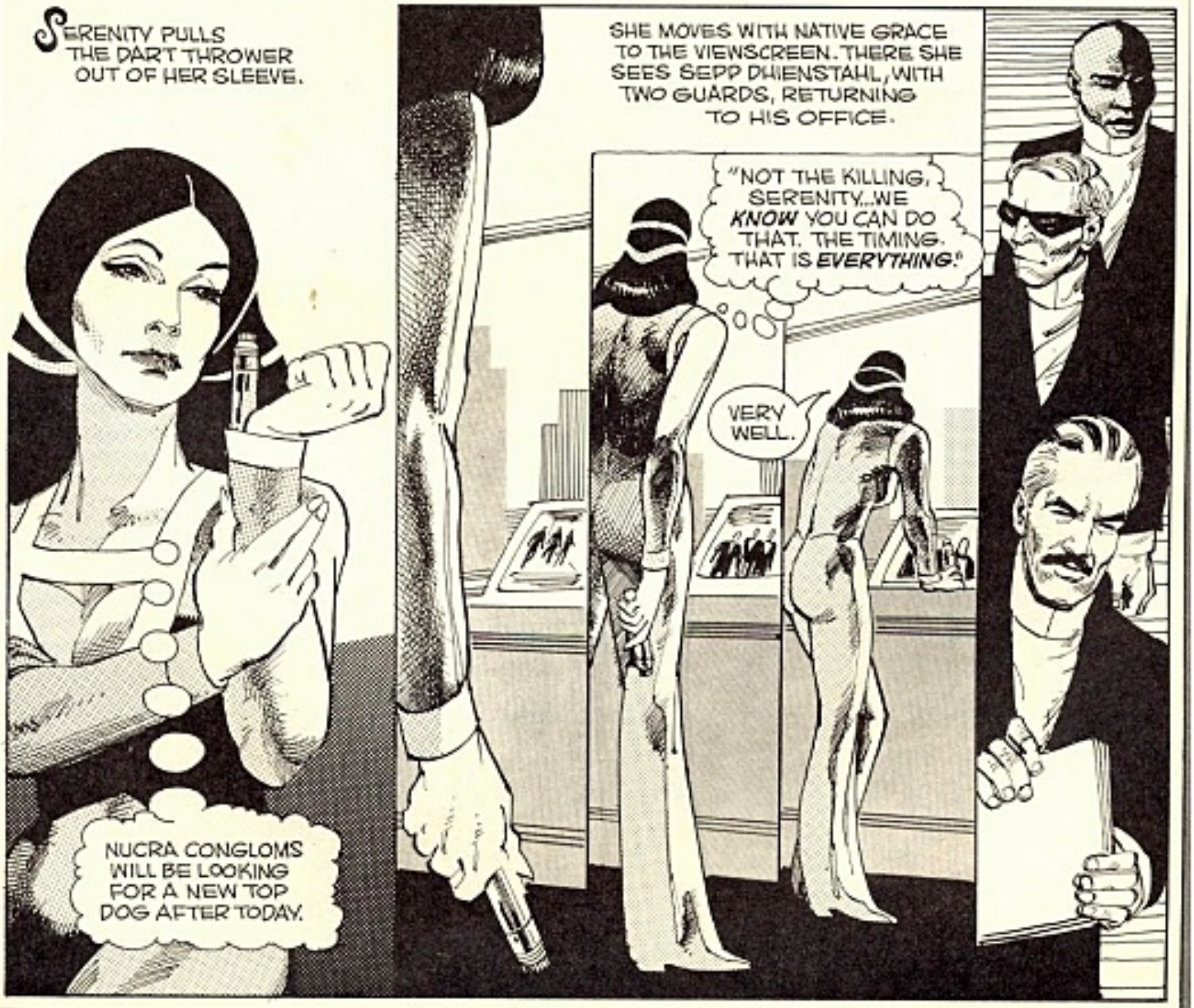
WEARINESS GRIPS TARN...
NEVER HAVE HIS STRENGTH, HIS SKILL, HIS STAMINA BEEN TESTED SO.

STILL... HIS FOE OF FOES LIES DEAD.

BUT THE DAMAGE, THE LOSS ARE AWESOME.
REBUILDING WILL BE THE WORK OF YEARS.

BUT HE IS TARN. HE WILL SEE IT DONE.
THIS IS HIS WORLD... AND ALL IS RIGHT AGAIN.

NUCRA CONGLOM


SERENITY PULLS THE DART THROWER OUT OF HER SLEEVE.
NUCRA CONGLOMS WILL BE LOOKING FOR A NEW TOP DOG AFTER TODAY.
SHE MOVES WITH NATIVE GRACE TO THE VIEWSCREEN. THERE SHE SEES SEPP DHIENSTAHL, WITH TWO GUARDS, RETURNING TO HIS OFFICE.
"NOT THE KILLING, SERENITY...WE KNOW YOU CAN DO THAT. THE TIMING. THAT IS EVERYTHING."
VERY WELL.

THE TRUE GAME

© 1980 ERNIE COLON

SPEEDMEMO TO: JACKLYN HYNA, PRES EMANEE CONGLOMS. SUBJ: DHIENSTAHL HAVE TERMINATED SUBJ AT PRECISE TIME INDIC. GUARD ATTEMPT AT RETALIATION THWARTED BY INSTANT DEMISE OF SUBJ. AM EN ROUTE TO NEW SWISS, COLLECT FEE. SERENITY. A21 930. speedmemo sent ship oper c/9

AN EASY TEN BIG ONES. FOR A SECOND I THOUGHT THE TWO GORILLAS WOULD SPEND ME REGARDLESS - BUT THEY DIDN'T *DARE*...

ODD HOW *QUICK* THEIR REACTIONS WERE... AS IF THEY'D *ANTICIPATED* MY MOVE.

DISTURBED BY MINUTE DETAIL, SERENITY CONCENTRATES. HER FINELY TRAINED MIND REELS OFF THE EVENT AS VIDEO ON A SCREEN. THE DETAIL DOES NOT MESH.

ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES - THEY *WANTED* HIM TO DIE, HIS OWN PEOPLE, OR - IT *WASN'T HIM*! THAT'S *IT*! IT *WASN'T* HIM!

ANXIETY, UNCERTAINTY, EVEN IN HER THOUGHTS, THEY PUSH SERENITY INTO THE SECURITY OF APPROVED CONGLOM-SPEAK...

WHAT TO DO? ADMIT TO EMPLOYERS MY FAILURE? FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES! GO ON AS IF ALL IN ORDER? BETTER FOR ME, THE LATTER. GAME TOO TIGHT. DEATH ONLY ANSWER FOR FAILURE. NO, NO. ALL IN ORDER AS FAR AS ME.

OFFICE OF JACKLYN HYNA, PRESIDENT OF EMANEE CONGLOMS.

RICH! OH, *RICHLY* DONE! MY CHOICE OF AGENT VINDICATED, GENTLEMEN! EMANEE GROWS AS WE SPEAK! *NUCRA* IS *OURS*!

CONGRATULATIONS, HYNA!

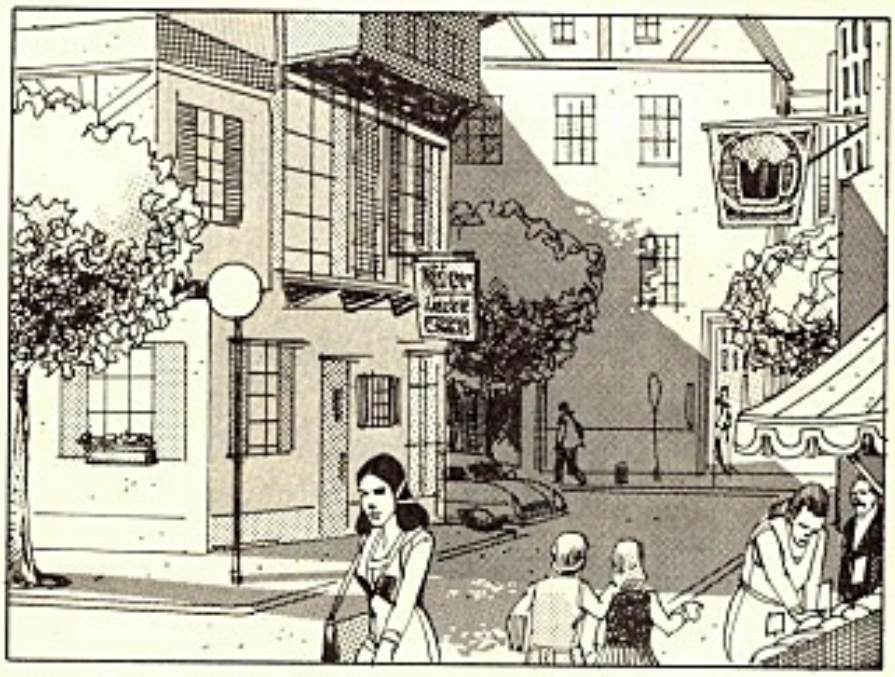
WELL DONE, JACKLYN! *FINE* GAME!

YOU'RE *AMAZING* MAN, HYNA! NO END IN SIGHT FOR EMANEE! FOREVER CONGLOM-- *FOREVER*!

GENTLEMEN - A MOMENT OF REFLECTION. BIG STAKES HERE. THE GAME PLAYED AT TRUEST, MAY I SAY? AT TRUEST?
ABSOLUTELY!
BEAR WITNESS - AT TOP FORM! TOP FORM!

THANK YOU, THANK YOU. GREATEST DAY IN EMANEE ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY. ALL, IN THIS ROOM, EACH, WILL PROFIT INDIVIDUALLY-- BEYOND DREAMS!
THERE IS A COLLECTIVE SIGH. ADMIRATION, RESPECT, FLOW TO JACKLYN HYNA, PRESIDENT UNLIMITED OF GREATEST CONGLOM IN HISTORY.

NEWSWISS -

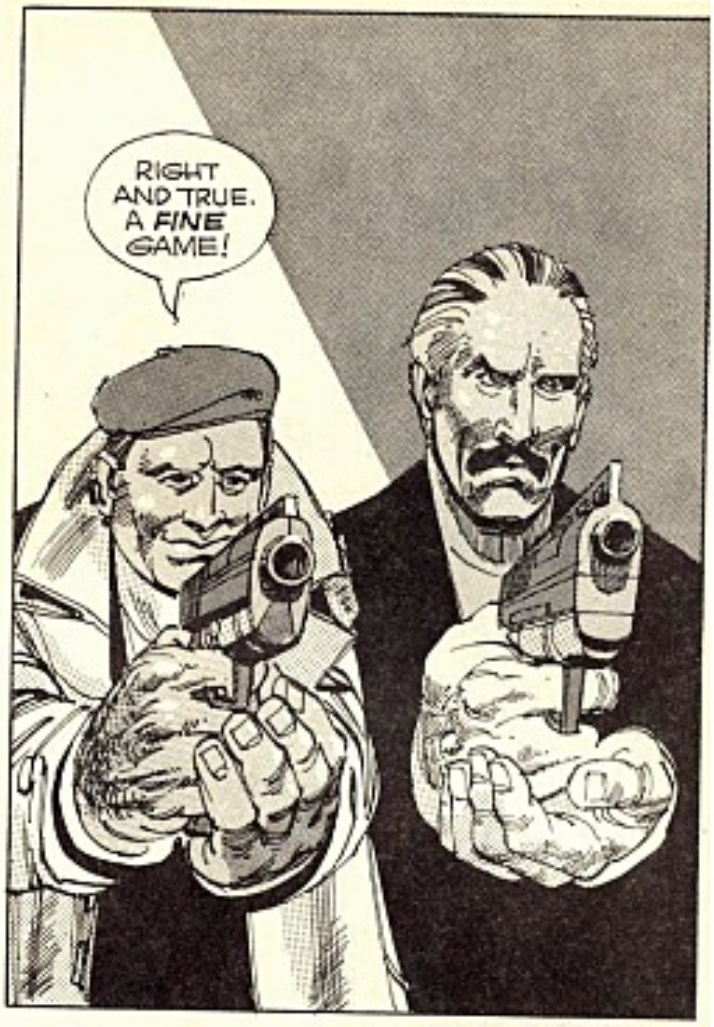


HELLO, SERENITY-

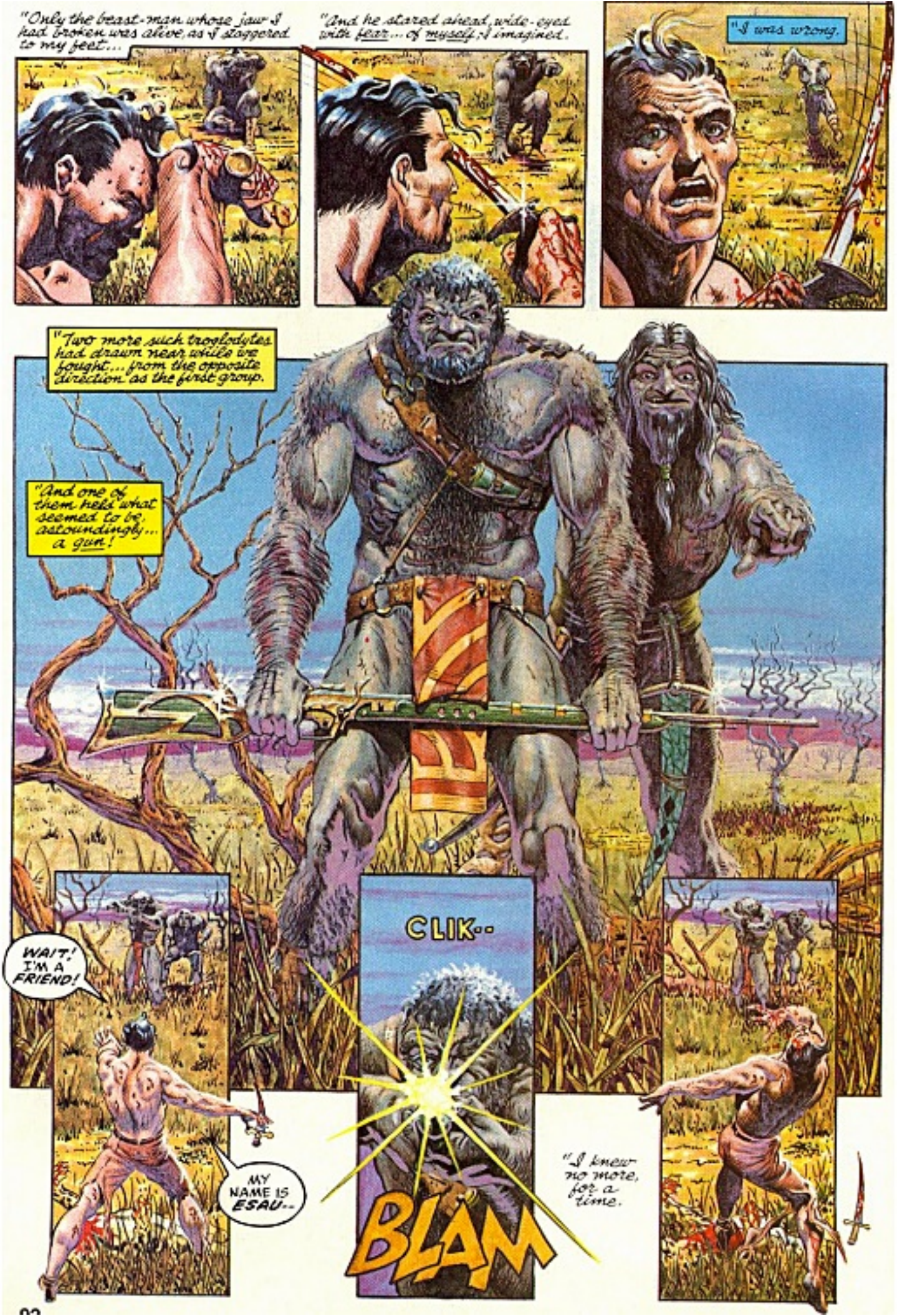
YOU DON'T MOVE, OR YOU DIE - NOW.
YOU! I KNEW IT! BUT YOU HAVE A DEAL IN MIND - OR YOU KILL ME WHERE I STAND, YES?

NO - WHY WOULD I KILL YOU? AN AGENT, PLAYING IT RIGHT? THE GAME WAS TRUE, SERENITY. I DON'T KILL YOU.
BIG RELIEF, I CONFESS IT - THOUGH I'M THROUGH AS AGENT.
TRUE. WE COLLECT YOUR FEE, BUT WE GIVE YOU YOUR LIFE. SPEEDMEMO OFFICE DOWN STREET. WHY NOT SEND HYNA MEMO TO EFFECT: "SHOT IMPOSTOR. SORRY FAILED." IT WOULD BE RIGHT.
YES. QUITE SO. ONLY RIGHT. I SEND IT...
AND NOW?
WE WAIT UNTIL SHE SENDS IT. WHEN SHE COMES OUT, WE KILL HER.

WHY DID SHE ACCEPT SO READILY THAT SHE SHOT AN IMPOSTOR? WHY DOESN'T SHE SEE THE IMPOSTOR IS YOU?
I DON'T KNOW. SHE SEEMED READY TO ACCEPT FAILURE, AS IF WE HAD ONLY REAFFIRMED IT.
OH, WELL. THE GAME IS STILL RIGHT.


RIGHT AND TRUE. A FINE GAME!

ALMURIC continued from page 20


"Only the beast-man whose jaw I had broken was alive, as I staggered to my feet...
"And he stared ahead, wide-eyed with fear... of myself, I imagined.
"I was wrong.
"Two more such troglodytes had drawn near while we fought... from the opposite direction as the first group.
"And one of them held what seemed to be, astoundingly... a gun!
WAIT! I'M A FRIEND!
MY NAME IS ESAU...
CLIK--
BLAM
"I knew no more, for a time.

"When I came to my senses, it was not slowly, but quickly and clear-headedly.
"My recuperative powers, I've learned, are immense... though my bandaged head throbbed madly.
"I found I was chained to a thick metal ring set in the wall, and only strangely-cut green stone met my gaze on all sides, except for...
"... a window!
"And from it, even as I cursed my shackles, I beheld for the first time the city of my captors...
"... and marveled that hairy, rough-voiced beast-men could have built such a monolithic fortress, in the midst of that vast and grassy plain!
"Just then, a slight noise caused me to wheel, snarling, my muscles tensed for attack or defense...
WHO'S THERE??

"But, what I saw froze me in my tracks!
I-- I DID NOT MEAN TO--
OUT OF OUR WAY, BITCH!
OHHH--!
LOOK! THE HAIRLESS ONE IS CONSCIOUS.
HE'S FROM BEYOND THE GIRDLE, I TELL YOU.
FROM BEYOND MY ASS!
WELL, WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM?
HIS HIDE WOULD MAKE GOOD LEATHER.
TOO SOFT!
I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TENDER HIS FLESH IS.
WATCH ME SLICE OFF A FEW STRIPS!
"From the moment one of my captors had struck the girl, my rage had been growing--till the chamber seemed to swim in a red mist.
"And now, bracing my feet, I strained against the wall-ring with all my strength--
"--and it gave way, catapulting me backward into the very midst of the beast-men!
ALL RIGHT, YOU GODDAM GORILLAS--

LET'S SEE HOW YOU FARE AGAINST A MAN!

"Oh, but that was a rough-house while it lasted! No brawl back on earth had ever tasted so sweet, and I'll wager I gave a good account of myself.

"But that damnable chain kept tripping me up, and already I was nearly blinded by blood streaming anew from my head wound...

"...so that, soon, I floundered and stumbled...

"...and they bore me down."

HIS WOUND'S OPEN AGAIN! HE'LL BLEED TO DEATH.

LET HIM! I'M *DYING!* GIVE ME SOME WINE!

IF YOU'RE DYING, YOU DON'T *NEED* WINE!

BIND UP HIS WOUND, AKRA.

AYE, I'LL TIE IT *TIGHT*-- TIGHT ENOUGH TO--

KEEP AWAY FROM ME, YOU SMIRKING MONKEY, OR I'LL *KILL* YOU

THAT'S A *PROMISE*-- SO HELP ME *GOD!*

NEXT ISSUE:

INTO THE PIT